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NAME OF AUTHOR/*NOM DE L'AUTEUR* Roy James Birckhead

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NAME OF SUPERVISOR/*NOM DU DIRECTEUR DE THÈSE* Dr. Regna Darnell

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DATED/*DATÉ* 22 Oct. 1976 SIGNED/*SIGNÉ* Roy James Birckhead

PERMANENT ADDRESS/*RÉSIDENCE FIXE* Goulburn College Of Advanced Education
Goulburn, New South Wales
Australia 2580

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

TOWARD THE CREATION OF A COMMUNITY OF SAINTS

©

by

ROY JAMES BIRCKHEAD

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Toward the Creation of A Community of Saints" submitted by Roy James Birckhead in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Regna Darnell
Supervisor

David E. Young

Edward Norbeck
External Examiner

Date 29 June, 1976

[redacted]

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an ethnographic study of ways in which members of an Appalachian serpent-handling church give meaning to their acts and create a sense of community and distinctive identity as "saints" and "apostles". Through analysis of myth-making, rites, and "accounting practices" an attempt is made to isolate the underlying, invariable rules of community membership. Four non-negotiable premises are isolated and examined as the basis from which the religion is generated and organized. In doing so, serpent-handlers' concepts, utilization, and management of supernatural power are examined and seen as central to community identity. A number of specific cases and examples are given.

PREFACE

This thesis is an ethnographic study of The Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name in Carson Springs, Tennessee. This church, formed in 1969, has a fluctuating membership averaging abour fifty persons who commonly refer to one another as "saints", "apostles", "snake or serpent-handlers", God's people", or "Holiness people". The church is one of abour 35 independent Pentecostal-Holiness congregations in Appalachia, the "Deep South", and the Midwestern United States which handle poisonous snakes and fire and drink poisons as routine features of worship.

Since the beginning of the religion in about 1909, 25 to 35 members have died from snakebites or poison, and many others have been bitten by snakes. Two members of The Holiness church Of God In Jesus Name died of strychnine consumed during a church service on April 7, 1973. Despite injury and death from these causes and and concomitant legal difficulties, the religion, as a whole, appears to be growing in numbers of participants and of independent churches, contrary to predictions of its imminent demise made by writers in the 1960's and early 1970's (e.g., La Barre 1962a). Since 1973, three new, independent congregations with 20 to 100 members have been formed by former participants of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name.

---

[1] See Appendix I for Serpent-Handling Lexicon.

This research was prompted by a desire to make sense of a religion that to outsiders seems bizarre, incomprehensible, or irrational. Initially, I sought to explain serpent-handling by viewing it as an acculturative response to the rapid industrialization and resultant shifts of population in Appalachia from farms to coal camps, company towns, and urban industrial centers (Birckhead 1971, 1972). From this perspective I tried to determine whether "cult" participation was functional or dysfunctional for its members. I abandoned this attempt, as the issue of functional versus dysfunctional significance appeared to impose on the religion an arbitrary simplicity and uniformity that obscured important aspects of its practice. Moreover, it soon became apparent that a study with these goals would be very difficult to do. My task would have been to examine the lives of all members and, on this basis, judge whether participation for each person was functionally positive or negative, a procedure which inevitably would involve value judgments and would have no bearing on many other questions one might ask regarding the religious behavior of these people.

In all of my field research with the group I have tried to examine behavior from the perspective of the actor. I participated in a wide range of formal and informal rites and other events of the group. By this means I was able to collect and systematize a lexicon of terms peculiar to the group, note rules of procedure as applied in various contexts, and gain an idea of the ways in which members made sense of their behavior. My principal aim was to understand the motivating concerns of the saints and the principles underlying their actions. Their religion centers upon a belief in supernatural power. The centrality of this idea is reflected in their lexicon, rules, rites, social organization, eschatology, and decision-making, controversies, leadership, folklore and is integral to their everyday experiences. The chapters which follow present a detailed interpretation following this line of thought.

I have not disguised the names of saints or their geographical locations for two reasons. The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name has received so much publicity since the strychnine deaths of two members that it would be virtually impossible to disguise the group effectively. Two popular books (Pelton and Carden 1974, 1976), a video tape production (Barrett 1973), television documentaries, an educational film, a number of radio and television interviews, and innumerable newspaper articles have been produced on this church. Disguising the location of the group is unnecessary since its members do not ordinarily attempt to conceal their practices from the public at large. On the whole, members are more than willing to present the gospel to a wider audience than fellow saints and often take pride in doing so. In part, a saint's validation of status is achieved through "witnessing" to non-believers. Failure on my part to acknowledge the often artful oral productions of members would, I think be doing them a disservice. As recognized by Goldstein (1964:58): ". . . the collector must remember that his informants have egos not unlike his own, and that they may achieve great satisfaction in knowing that their names and contributions are recorded in print". I have tried to use discretion, or have not used at all, material that I regard as "sensitive", private, or potentially disruptive to the community. It is my sincere hope that to the members of the church, this account is accurate and inoffensive.

For fear of overstatement, I feel constrained to qualify my statement that this account describes the saints and their behaviors from their own point of view. For brief periods I was sometimes able to shed my ordinary assumptions and views of the world but, of course, I did not become a saint in the sense of seeing the world through the "spiritual mind" or experiencing an infusion of power. From the perspective of the saints, then, this study suffers from inherent limitations since I have no personal knowledge of certain experiences important to them. I am aware also that my account reflects the tension between my perspectives as a participant in community life and as an anthropologist who must make some theoretical sense of his subjects of study, and I trust that saints as well as fellow anthropologists will understand the problems of attempting to translate one conceptual system into the logic and terminology of another.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I owe special thanks to Dr. Regna Darnell, thesis director, friend, graduate advisor, and creative anthropologist. The specific focus and approach of the study emerged largely from my seminars, reading courses, and conversations over tea with her.

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Additionally, I thank a number of close friends in the South and in Alberta for their encouragement and support and

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Of course, I appreciate the patience, friendship, hospitality, and help given by the members of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name, and of the other churches that I visited. The late Reverend Jimmy Williams, Mary Kate Williams, the late Reverend Buford Pack, Reverend Alfred Ball, Eunice Ball, Brother Liston Pack, Nellie Pack, Gene Pack, Lester Ball, Ralph and Bea Eslinger, Jackie Eslinger, Reverend Clyde Ricker, Bob and Barb Fraley, Paul Stidham, Floyd McCall, Robert and Agnes Grooms, and many others deserve special mention.

I am grateful to Wendy Walker-Birckhead for introducing me to ethnomethodology, editing innumerable manuscripts, providing insight and criticism, and for her loving support and patience throughout the difficult months of writing.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my grandfather, Roy Birckhead, whose many questions, long term interest, and faith helped sustain the project from its inception.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE THEORETICAL PROBLEM

The handling of serpents by members of modern religious sects of the United States rests upon the belief that participants gain access to supernatural power, as described in the Bible. The religion's lexicon, rules, rites, social organizations, and folklore all reflect the centrality of a belief in supernatural power useful in human life. Through analysis of the myths, rites, and "accounting" practices of one of these sects, this study presents an interpretation of the ways in which members give meaning to their acts and create a sense of community and distinctive identity as saints and apostles.

My approach is primarily ethnographic. Ethnography as conceptualized here departs from the traditional textbook definition of ". . . a descriptive account of customs of a group of people" (Aceves 1974:5). Rather, following the work of Frake (1961, 1964a, 1964b, 1972), Goodenough (1956, 1961, 1963, 1964, 1965) Hymes (1964, 1969, 1972, 1973), Spradley (1970, 1972), Spradley and McCurdy (1975), Sturtevant (1964), Tyler (1969), and Wallace (1962). I conceive ethnography as being a theoretic-analytic enterprise that may be seen as a ". . . legitimate end in itself" (Quinn 1975:22, after Goodenough 1956:37). A description follows of the main assumptions and procedures of ethnographic analysis as used in this study.

First, following Goodenough (1964:11), a distinction is made between ". . . the phenomenal order of observed events and the regularities they exhibit", and "the ideational order . . . of ideal forms as they exist in people's minds." Furthermore, ". . . as an organization of past experience, the ideational order is a means for organizing and interpreting new experience" (Ibid.). This insight has considerable importance for ethnographic analysis as, ". . . the phenomenal order of a community, its characteristic 'way of life' is an artifact of the ideational order of its members" (Ibid., p. 12). Goodenough (1964:11) also notes the confusion that results when anthropologists neglect to distinguish between the two orders. Traditional ethnographies often remain at the level of classifying and ordering observed events within the phenomenal realm. Keeping this distinction in mind, the goals of ethnography can be delineated further.

Second, the purpose of ethnography is to probe ". . . beneath the complexity of observed events to seek the underlying invariances" (Keesing 1971:37). The concern, here, is with rules or knolwedge that explain and/or organize surface diversity of the phenomenal world. Thus, the ethnographer (Frake 1964b:132):

> . . . seeks to describe an infinite set of variable messages as manifestations of a finite shared code, the code being a set of rules for the socially appropriate construction and interpretation of messages (socially interpretable acts and artifacts).

Third, Frake goes on to posit that the purpose of ethnography is interpretation rather than prediction. He (Ibid., p. 133) concludes that:

> The model of an ethnographic statement is not: 'if a person is confronted with stimulus X, he will do Y,' but 'if a person is in situation X, performance Y will be judged appropriate by native actors'.
>
> To describe a culture, then, is not to recount the events of a society but to specify what one must know to make those events maximally probable. The problem is not to state what someone did but to specify the conditions under which it is culturally appropriate to anticipate that he, or persons occupying his role, will render an equivalent performance.

To reiterate then, in this study I am differentiating between observed behavior and underlying knowledge and, making that distinction, I am interested in the dynamic interrelationship between underlying principles and behavior. My specific emphasis is on member's ongoing making sense and interpretations of the meaning of social interactions.

The definitions and conceptions of ethnography delineated here have been derived largely from cognitive anthropology (or ethnoscience). A goal of ethnoscience is to arrive at members' meanings (get inside their heads--Frake 1964b:133) through an examination of folk terminological systems, or to discern how ". . . people construe their world of experience from the way they talk about it" (Frake

1972:192). My approach is not primarily cognitive. As traditionally conceived, ethnoscience proves to be a static enterprise unable to account for "what the natives do" (Murphy 1971:162) as opposed to what they say they do. It is unable also to account for intra-cultural diversity, for individuals' variable uses of terms in various contexts, and for the variable and non-referential meanings of terms themselves (what Keesing--1972:314--calls "the slippery problem of polysemy"). As conceived of here, ethnoscience poses the basic questions for ethnographic analysis, but lacks effective methods for providing adequate answers.[1]

In analyzing the data of this study ethnoscientific techniques were employed as a starting point. Specifically, I isolated and delineated lexical items within the semantic domain of supernatural power. This demonstrated the saliency of the domain and provided some insight into the underlying organizing principles of the religion. However, the approach did not provide vocabulary or concepts to deal with what I came to see as the central problem of this study--i.e., the emergence of meaning from ongoing interaction.

My interest, then, is in the dynamic, creative aspects of community life, which can be isolated through the analysis of interaction (both spoken and non-spoken). This view is conceptualized largely from the ethnography of communications, transformational-generative linguistics, and ethnomethodology. My central propostion is that community and social order are to be viewed as "emergent, problematic, and to be discovered" (Hymes 1973:36) rather than as non problematic and unitary (all of a kind) phenomena. To lend emphasis to the processes of community creation and maintenance, I refer to the serpent-handling group as a "community of saints" rather than as the more static concepts of cult, sect, and church.

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[1] For further exposition of the pros, cons, and conceptual bases of ethnoscience, see Berreman (1966), Birckhead (1974), Burling (1964), Colby (1966), and Harris (1968).

The designation, "community of saints", is derived primarily from the notion of "the speech community" (Bauman and Sherzer 1974; Gumperz 1964, 1972; Hymes 1964, 1972). The focus is on members' ". . . production and interpretation of socially appropriate speech" (Bauman and Sherzer 1974:6) and, by extension, behavior in general, vis-a-vis "ground rules". By definition, such a community is seen as "an organization of diversity" (Ibid., Wallace 1961:27-28).[2]

In focusing on community ground rules, or on the ideational invariances that underlie social interaction, I take Chomskyan transformational-generative linguistics as a reference point. Chomsky's (1957) concepts of "abstract structures underlying things people actually said (deep structure)" (Darnell and Vanek, ms) and of generativeness are particularly relevant. As conceptualized by Chomsky (1957) regarding speech, the grammar of a language is capable of generating an infinite set of sentences.[3,4] In borrowing from this model, I am dealing with generativeness at the level of the interacting community rather than of the individual, and am concerned with the abstract knolwedge of community members rather than with speech production alone.

---

[2] As discussed in Chapter V, I take the designation "speech community" as being redundant. Thus, the definitions given by Hymes et al. provide a definition of the community in general

By selectively applying Chomsky's model, I hope to emphasize the generative-creative aspects of the community, and to provide a dynamic for fully realizing the goals of ethnographic analysis (as previously outlined). Specifically, I will isolate what I consider to be the four underlying, non-negotiable propositions of the religion from which behavior and members' interpretations of behavior are derived and/or generated. As discussed in Chapter VIII, I conceive these as shared knowledge, "incorrigible propositions" (Gasking 1955:432, and Mehan and Wood 1975:9-10), or invariable assumptions (following Labov's--1972--invariable rules).[5] Through an examination of saints' decision-making in situations

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[3] Lyons (1970:43) notes that ". . . Chomsky has continually warned us against identifying the 'production' of sentences within the grammar with the production of sentences by the speaker of a language".

[4] Generative grammar can be criticized on many levels. Most notably, context variables are often not accounted for in its applications (Darnell 1972; Darnell and Vanek, ms.). Also, many ethnographic applications of the model have been based on inaccurate knowledge of its premises (keesing 1972).

[5] An "incorrigible proposition is one which you would never admit to be false whatever happens . . ." (Gasking 1955: 432, in Mehan and Wood 1975:9-10). In looking at invariable assumptions (assumptions that are taken as the non-negotiable basis of group membership) I am contrasting these with variable rules (Labov 1972) or, "optional rules" (Darnell 1972:10) that are negotiable during interaction.

where supernatural power apparently fails, I will show how (from the four abstract propositions) saints may construct a seemingly limitless number of logical interpretations.

In looking at members' making sense of unfolding interaction, I am applying a number of concepts from ethnomethodology. Although applications of this perspective are ordinarily restricted to micro analysis of conversation in highly bounded or experimental settings in Western urban society, I am suggesting that aspects of this approach are useful to an understanding of how members construct meaning through interaction.

Ethnomethodology focuses on how ". . . commonplace (everyday, taken-for-granted) activities are characterized by an implicit order that emerges during the course of interaction and the activity itself" (Churchill 1971:103).[6] Specifically, interaction is seen as: ". . . activity that accomplishes a sense of an external world. Meaning is viewed as ceaseless sensuous activity" (Meehan and Wood 1975:5). What is of interest is the ways in which members go ". . . about the task of seeing, describing, and explaining order in the world in which they live" (Zimmerman and Wieder 1970:289), so as to make that world ". . . visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all practical purposes, i.e., 'accountable' (Garfinkel 1967:vii). (Garfinkel sometimes refers to this as "accounting practices").

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[6] Ethnomethodology developed within traditional sociology as a reaction to that discipline's penchant toward "normative theory" (Meehan and Wood 1975:96) in which meaning and social order were viewed as stable features that exist independent of social interaction (Ibid., p. 5) or, as ". . . a monolithic system that settles down and around persons, ever giving them directions for action" (Zimmerman and Wieder 1970:297). In effect, ethnomethodology can be seen as a "sociology of sociology"

My emphasis, consistent with these purposes, is on members' use of speech in making evident the significant features of their environment (notably their beliefs concerning the reality and efficacy of supernatural power). Speech viewed in this way can be seen as being "reflexive" (Garfinkel 1967). Churchill (1971:185) posits that: Reflexivity refers to the social activities whereby members create and maintain the very situations in which they at the same time act".[7] Speech use viewed as reflexive is also seen as being "indexical" (Garfinkel 1967) or situated. In other words, meaning is not derived from dictionary usage, but derives from the situation, for the purposes at hand, viz-a-vis members' shared knowledge.

The specific focus with respect to serpent-handlers is on ways in which members accomplish the "facticity"[8] of

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As implied above, ethnomethodology can be criticized on a number of theoretical and methodological grounds. See, for example, American Sociological Review (1968:122-130), and Mayrl (1973:15-28).

[7] Regarding reflexivity, "each particular act refers to a greater whole or context of which it is a part, thereby constituting it while at the same time the whole or context reflects back onto the act or part as the context in terms of which the act has meaning" (Shearing 1973:13).

[8] Garfinkel (1967) uses this term a number of times without actually defining it. The sense in which it is used

their religion through ". . . their efforts at detecting, counting, recording, analyzing, and reporting on events in that setting" (Zimmerman and Wieder 1970:290). This study will focus on those events in which supernatural power is manifested and on members' organization of those experiences. Following from this, I will look at a wide variety of activities, including sermons, singing, testimonies, formal teaching, everyday conversations, rites, etc.. What is of particular interest here is members' practices for making a number of the religion's facets accountable and, in doing so, creating and sustaining the facticity of supernatural power. Throughout the study numerous detailed examples of members' accounting practices will be presented. Although many of the examples might on superficial examination seem anectdotal, they are cited as representative, nevertheless, of the interactional work of serpent-handlers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Until relatively recently, journalists and popular writers seemed more interested in serpent-handling than did social scientists. Newspaper articles on the religion date from at least the 1930's, and fictionalized accounts of serpent-handling are provided in books by Risley (1930) and, Preece and Kraft (1946). Kerman (1942), Callahan (1952), Robertson

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by ethnomethodologists is conveyed in the following excerpt: "It is not so much a faith about a fact in the world as a faith in the facticity of the world itself" (Mehan and Wood 1975:9).

(1950), Thomas (1942), and Womeldorf (1947) present journalistic descriptions of serpent-handling services; as do early articles in Life Magazine (1944), Saturday Evening Post (1957), and Time Magazine (1945), 1947, 1947). Many of the above works, as well as numerous newspaper reports on the religion, are biased and inaccurate--more often than not sensationalizing the religion. A notable exception to this is J. B. Collins' (1947) Tennessee Snake Handlers, which presents a low-keyed journalistic account of serpent-handling at The Dolley Pond Church of God With Signs Following, near Grasshopper, Tennessee. More recently, popular works by Campbell (1974), Dickinson and Benziger (1974), Foxfire (1973), Holliday (1968) and Pelton and Carden (1974, 1976) present a relatively accurate descriptive picture of serpent-handling.

Serpent-handling is first dealt with in the scientific literature by Sargant (1949); 1957). Sargant views some of the religion's emotional aspects as "cultural group abreactive techniques" that compare in significant ways with contemporary psychotherapy techniques.

Berthold E. Schwarz, M.D. (1960) published the first scholarly article dealing specifically with the religion. He focuses on serpent-handlers' physiological responses to various "ordeals" of the religion (serpent and fire handling, and poison consumption). While Schwarz's findings are not conclusive, a number of provocative hypotheses are raised concerning participants' apparent immunity to snakebite, applications of fire, and poison. In addition, this research, based on fieldwork, provides a good descriptive overview of the beliefs and practices of the religion.

Weston La Barre (1962a) in They Shall Take Up Serpents: Psychology Of The Southern Snake-Handling Cult (and in two articles 1962b, 1964) provides the first anthropological approach to the religion. La Barre views serpent-handling as an acculturative response to the rapid industrialization of the rural south. La Barre's theoretical position derives largely from Freudian Psychology and Devereaux's concept of the "crises cult". For La Barre, participants in such "cults" do not deal with stress objetively and in their inapposite attempts at coping, ". . . only exacerbate the stress and create new difficulties" (La Barre 1962a: 171). Based on extensive Freudian cross-cultural interpretation of the significance of the snake as a phallic symbol, La Barre posits that, in conquering the serpent, "cult" members are attempting to symbolically deal with repressed libido problems. Aside from problems of psychological reductionism (see Birckhead 1970, 1971, 1972, 1975), the studies contribute less than they might, as La Barre's work is based on newspaper accounts, second hand observations, and an apparently superficial psychiatric interview of one informant rather than on any extensive fieldwork. The primary contribution of La Barre's book (1962a) is that it draws together heretofore unorganized historical data, and outlines the legal difficulties encountered by a serpent-handling group in Durham, North Carolina. This well written and provocative book has generated considerable research interest in serpent-handling and continues to serve as one of the basic references in this research area.

Folklorist Ellen J. Stekert (1963) deals with the impact of serpent-handling religion on traditional secular folk genres. Although serpent-handlers reject traditional märchen, singing, and dancing as sinful, Stekert suggests that folklorists focus on new genres that are developing around the feats and practices of the religion. Stekert sees the church as a positive means in peoples' coping with the encroachments of the outside world as it ". . . helps members to cope with the humiliation of their past as well as the confusion of the present" (Stekert 1963:321). This brief article is more programatic than conclusive, pointing out future research concerns.

Alice L. Cobb (1965) provides a relatively detailed view of religion's role in preserving "conservative mores of isolated rural people" (Cobb 1965:1). Based on her thirty years of experience in Pine Mountain Community, Kentucky, she includes some details of serpent-handling at The Pine Mountain Church of God. Cobb's theoretical perspective is derived from sociological concepts of the church-sect typology, Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft orientations, and manifest/latent function. On the whole, Cobb's work is of little relevance to the present study. However, Cobb provides some particularly pertinent material in her discussion of "surface norms" as opposed to "deeper norms" or "deep knowledge" (Ibid., p. 154). Although she does not develop these ideas fully, she equates "deep knowledge" with the underlying shared "religious attitude" (Ibid., p. 169) or "primitive morality" (ibid) of the community. In other words: "There is something on Mutton (Creek) that holds onto a man and his family. It is a thing everybody knows without knowing" (Ibid., p. 4). Cobb's study leaves many questions unanswered, but it poses and attempts to deal with important concerns. Her clear description, historical data, and longitudinal perspective on a community is invaluable.

Sociologist Nathan L. Gerrard and his wife Louise B. Gerrard studied a West Virginia serpent-handling congregation for some ten years. Proceeding from a sociological and psychological functionalist approach, the Gerrards administered the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory to serpent-handlers at Scrabble Creek and to members of a middle class congregation in the same area. The Gerrards conclude that the serpent-handlers fared somewhat better with respect to depressive symptomatology than did their counterparts in the conventional church. Serpent-handlers are seen also as being more spontaneous, ". . . more exhititionalistic, excitable, and pleasure-oriented . . . and . . . less controlled by considerations of conformity to the general culture, particularly middle class culture" (Gerrard 1966d:56). Gerrard also presents a critique of La Barre's work (1966b, 1968, 1971, Gerrard, Tellegen and Butcher 1969), and Louise Gerrard provides an excellent description of services at Scrabble Creek (Gerrard 1966a).

Anthropologist Steven M. Kane (a student of La Barre) wrote an M.A. Thesis (1973) on serpent-handling as well as a paper (1974) and two articles (1974, 1974). Besides providing historical and descriptive data on the religion, Kane focuses primarily on "spirit possession" and physiological explanations for the thaumaturgical feats of the church. Kane's work relies heavily on the literature of trance and possession states. He is currently working on a Doctoral Dissertation at Princeton University, based on extensive fieldwork with West Virginia serpent-handlers (Kane, 1974, personal conversation).

Historian Paul R. L. Vance wrote an M.A. Thesis (1975) on the history of serpent-handling in Georgia, North Alabama, and Southeastern Tennessee. Although this study is not theoretical, Vance provides impressive evidence to counter the view posited by La Barre (1962a) and most other writers, that all early occurances of serpent-handling can be linked to the activities of George Went Hensley (the religion's alleged founder). In addition, Vance fills in gaps in the historical record and corrects many of the inaccuracies that persist in the literature.

The work of sociologists Kirk W. Elifson and Peggy S. Tripp is of particular interest to the present study. Tripp (1975) wrote an M.A. Thesis analyzing serpent-handlers as a deviant subculture, from an interactionist perspective. Kirk Elifson (Tripp's thesis advisor) collaborated in the research on a church near Atlanta, Georgia. Elifson and Tripp (1975, 1975) also presented two primarily descriptive papers on their work. They are currently working on a book (1976) which further explicates the perspective developed in Tripp's thesis. Elifson and Tripp focus on serpent-handlers' perceptions of persecution in terms of labeling theory, deviant identity, and boundary maintenance. Their perspective and methodology are largely sociological, relying heavily on formal interview schedule's. They provide useful interpretive material on the belief system of the church and on various mitigating factors that explain the low rate of injury and death from snakebite.

In conclusion, a number of researchers have examined selected aspects of serpent-handling utilizing various theoretical perspectives. With the exceptions of Tripp (1975) and Elifson and Tripp (1976) (and perhaps Cobb 1965), studies of serpent-handling have focused primarily on either the sociological or psychological functions of participation in the religion; or, on the psycho-physical dimension of the trance and possession states experienced by participants. Much of the research on serpent-handling is narrow in focus, dealing primarily with bounded ritual performances, such as serpent-handling or glossolalia. The religion as a socio-cultural system has been neglected.[9]

In relation to the specific concerns of this study, the literature of serpent-handling provides little insight into how saints deal with what, to the outside observer, constitute disconfirmations of their ideal claims about the efficacy of supernatural power. Most studies make only passing reference to how serpent-handlers account for injury or death by snakebite and/or poison. Nathan Gerrard (1968:23), for example, notes that ". . . for their part, the serpent-handlers say the Lord causes a snake to strike in order to refute scoffers' claims that the snakes' fangs have been pulled". He further notes that each death is interpreted ". . . as a sign that the Lord, 'really had to show the scoffers how dangerous it is to obey His commandments". Or, Berthold E. Schwarz, M.D. (1960:412) states that, ". . . when a bitten members suffers complications or dies, it is because 'he didn't have enough faith'". Ellen Stekert (1963:412) observes that: "If a person does get hurt, it is explained away by the fact that his 'faith lapsed' for a moment." Weston La Barre (1962a:12, 41, 45, 49) provides three rationales given by informants: in one case of serpent-bite the man who was bitten was denounced as a "blackslider"; in another case, it was explained that believers should be bitten to test their power--the rationale being that the "'power' in them was demonstrated by their not subsequently dying from the bite"; and, lastly, when the alleged founder of the "cult", George Hensley, died of snakebite in 1955, people felt that he was ". . . doing the right thing in giving his life to God".

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[9] In addition to the above sources, serpent-handling is dealt with summarily by a number of writers. See Birckhead (1972) for detailed discussion of these minor references.

The image provided in the above accounts portrays a "replication of uniformity" rather than an "organization of diversity" (Wallace 1961:27-29). Little or no account is given of the variability and range of explanations or of the processes employed by members to construct, elaborate one, or change their accounts. Also, context, actor, or the purposes at hand are not accounted for. In these examples, what serpent-handlers do in cases of injury or death is presented as unproblematic, predictable, simply generalizable, and as ". . . stable and finite 'things'" (Mehan and Wood 1975:75).[10]

More recently Steven M. Kane (1974:260) provides a more complete account of how saints deal with the meaning of signs that fail:

> Many snake-handlers interpret complications or death from snake bite as evidence that the victim 'didn't have enough faith' or was 'out of the will of the Lord'. Others see snake bite as an indication that a devotee failed to 'wait on the anointing' and attempted to handle 'in the flesh' rather than 'in the spirit'. A South Carolina brother offered yet another explanation: 'If no one ever got bit, what kind of a sign would serpent-handling be? The Lord sometimes lets the snakes bite to show unbelievers that we don't pull their teeth or milk the poison out of them'.

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[10] It is unfair, perhaps, to criticize the above writers for their handling of members' accounts as their works were either very general or dealing with specific theories that had little or no concern with accounts or interaction. The point that this has been neglected in the literature remains valid, nonetheless.

Although Kane provides reasons similar to those given above, he implicitly recognizes the variability of interpretations. As well, Elifson and Tripp (1976:21-32), and freelance writers Pelton and Carden (1974, 1976) record some of serpent-handlers variable explanations for death or injury.

Even though the above writers recognize variability in accounts they do not provide data on how accounts are arrived at or negotiated in social situations or, of the underlying rules that accounts are generated from. Accounting is presented as a stable accomplishment. That ". . . meanings in everyday life are bound to context and personal history" (Mehan and Wood 1975:66) is not accounted for in these attempts to ascertain the meanings snakebite, etc. have for members. As well as ignoring important theoretical concerns, the above writers, for the most part, restrict their concern to dramatic cases involving death or injury, neglecting mention of the ongoing problem of members' everyday management of supernatural power. This study addresses itself to some of these gaps in the scientific literature on serpent-handling.

DATA COLLECTION

Data for this study were collected through participant-observation at The Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name (Newport, Tennessee) during the summers of 1971 and 1972, the fall of 1972, various periods in the spring, summer, and fall of 1973; and in the late fall of 1974. Additional information was obtained at serpent-handling meetings at Totz (1966), Pine Mountain, Lond, and Middlesboro, Kentucky; Brevard and Marshall, North Carolina; Greenville, South Carolina; Morristown, Tennessee; and, Bit Stone Gap, Virginia. Total time spent in the field was approximately twelve months. I attended over one hundred services, as well as three baptisms, one funeral, a tent revival, a church homecoming, "dinner on the grounds", "special singing services", a wedding in a member's home, prayer services in saints' homes, and a number of church radio broadcasts (in the studio).[11] During this time, I witnessed only three incidents of serpent-bite. I also observed poison drinking, fire handling, exorcism, glossolalia, Divine healing, foot washing and the "Lord's supper", interpretation of tongues, serpent-exchange, etc..

Much of the data in this study derive from close involvement with saints outside of formal church services. This type of involvement included: participation in two court hearings concerning the church; being present at impromptu serpent-handling in homes, along roadsides, or during serpent exchanges; accompanying saints on church visitations to other states; living with one family for short periods of time, as well, staying overnight in a number of other homes; participating in picnics, fishing trips, special dinners, helping with farm chores, a shopping trip with sisters in the church, accompanying saints to plants and warehouses where they were employed, and travelling with the pastor on some long distance truck runs.

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[11] Fundamentalist churches in Victoria, British Columbia; Edmonton, Alberta; St. Louis, Missouri; Wolf Creek and Big Rock, Kentucky; and in Cookeville, Nashville, Knoxcille, and Morristown, Tennessee were visited also in order to better understand the larger tradition of which serpent-handling is a part.

Throughout the periods of fieldwork, I attempted to arrive at a participants view of their religion. I participated as fully as possible with saints under natural circumstances but did not force interaction. On the whole, my stance as a fieldworker was low-keyed and unobtrusive. My interest was to observe "front" as well as "back stage" interaction (Goffman 1959). As my knowledge of appropriate speech and behavior increased, I became a partial member of the community with access to the most personal of back stage realities. I was often seen as a "safe" confidant and given access to private knowledge that was not be shared with others in the church and, of course, not with the outside world.[12] Saints usually referred to me as "Brother Jimmy" and sometimes indicated in testimony or everyday conversations that I was considered a member of the group. Saints did not exert overt pressure on me to be converted as is sometimes the fate of researchers of fundamentalist religion. When saints at other churches attempted to covert me, saints would say simply, that "this is Brother Jimmy from Alberto, (sic) Canada, he's studying . . . and visits a lot of churches". At no time during the fieldwork did I handle serpents or engage in any other thaumaturgical act that validated one's status as saint. I was viewed by many in the church as a "brother" and a friend, but at no time as a saint.

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[12] In this study, highly sensitive or very personal information is either not presented or disguised.

In the field I had the opportunity to observe reporters, film makers, and researchers eliciting information from church members. This reinforced my position that direct questioning, alone, is inadequate in arriving at accurate insights into ongoing social process. Answers given to such questions often consisted of, consciously or unconsciously constructed, statements of "official" reality. Adequate data on how members negotiate their social scenes can be collected only by painstaking observation of a wide range of situations, noting the intersection of ideal reality with actual behavior and back stage commentary. Saints' maxim that ". . . you have to pay the price" is quite accurate with regard to fieldwork. Fieldwork is built on that, obligation, and reciprocity. Superficial relationships with "informants" tends to beget superficial and inadequate data. There are no shortcuts in this regard when working with serpent-handlers. I have seen a number of interviewers fail because they attempted to push people too fast, or in general acted inappropriately. It was instructive to observe the depth of information available when one is involved in the community as opposed to what is presented to the superficial observer.

I also conducted a number of informal interviews, some of which were tape recorded. Selected church services and church radio broadcasts were also recorded. Brother Ralph Eslinger provided me with additional cassette recordings that he had made of a number of services and radio broadcasts over a six month period. Liston Pack gave me a five-minute sound film (produced by United Press International) dealing with the strychnine deaths in the church. Alfred Ball, the late Jimmy Williams, Liston Pack, Ralph Eslinger, and Floyd McCall (Greenville, South Carolina) willingly allowed us to view their scrapbook collections. Also, I corresponded with some members of the church and continue to receive news clippings, posters, and current information.

Considerable background and historical data utilized in this study were collected at a number of libraries and archives, and through inter-library loan. Historical data were obtained at the Church of God Archives (Cleveland, Tennessee) and at the Archives of the Chattanooga Public Library. Useful background material was obtained from the Council of The Southern Mountains Bookstore and at the personal library of Dr. Nathan Gerrard (Charleston, West Virginia). Research was also conducted at a number of university, and public libraries.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This study does not purport to be a comprehensive study of serpent-handling in general or of The Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name in particular. Rather, following from the theoretical approach outlined in this chapter, only selected aspects of the religious community will be examined. The study will now proceed by examining "Histories Of Serpent-Handling".

CHAPTER II

HISTORIES OF SERPENT-HANDLING

In looking at the religion's past, two contrastive modes of historical methodology are available. The development of serpent-handling can be seen as analyzed by historians, anthropologists, and students of religion. In this academic mode of reckoning history, events are placed in strict chronological sequence, i.e., with "'one thing after another' in linear progression and with equal weight given to each stretch or unit" (Pruyser 1968:215). Pruyser terms this mode of analysis, "chronos". The "chronos" approach, may be contrasted with what Pruyser identifies as a "kairos" orientation to time and the past. Specifically, "kairos" represents ". . . time seen as opportunity, event, fullness, turning point, crisis, or occasion for celebration" (ibid.), rather than as formal chronological progression. As will be demonstrated, "kairos" represents members' mode of time reckoning in a serpent-handling congregation.

In recording a history of serpent-handling, both modes of apprehending time are important, and complementary. This chapter will trace the general history of serpent-handling as recorded in the literature and as recounted by members of The Holiness Church of God in Jesus Name. In developing the folk notion of serpent-handling's past the emphasis is on members' historical stories. Through contrasting the two approaches to history, the notion of history-making as a resource will be developed.

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF SERPENT-HANDLING: A CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE FROM RELIGIOUS HISTORY

Publications on the history of the handling of serpents are few and appear to be limited to the works of Collins (1947); La Barre (1962a), and Vance (1975). The scope of these publications has been necessarily limited by a lack of accurate written records of the religion's past. As will be shown, serpent-handlers do not ordinarily record the significant events of their religious life in writing. Theirs is primarily an oral tradition. When written documentation is made, the logical ordering principle is spiritual rather than secular and, consequently, many details needed by the historian to reconstruct the past are lacking. Thus, the researcher must rely on old newspaper clippings (which are often inaccurate), transcripts of court cases involving serpent-handlers, notes in family Bibles, and, of course, the oral accounts of serpent-handlers.

For the most part, to record the religious milieu in which serpent-handling developed, it is necessary to consult theses, dissertations, and scholarly works on the overall history of the Pentecostal-Holiness tradition or on the development of religion in Appalachia and the Southeastern

United States. As this material on the whole is of excellent quality, easily available, and generally known by students of religion, I will not attempt to duplicate or précise this mass of data. Rather, selected aspects will be isolated to emphasize particular analytical points that are of significance to the thrust of this study.

Serpent-handling is rooted in the Pentecostal-Holiness tradition. With the exceptions of taking up serpents, drinking deadly poisons, and fire handling, these congregations are almost indistinguishable from numerous other Pentecostal[1] groups throughout the Western World (especially groups in the rural Southern and Midwestern United States). Rather than attempting an exhaustive chronology of events leading up to the development of serpent-handling, this section will isolate those elements of the religios milieu which antedate and are evident still in the beliefs and practices of serpent-handling churches. These elements will be discussed in order according to their time depth.

One of the basic tenets of this tradition was articulated in the fourteenth century by John Wycliff who proposed that the meaning of Biblical passages could be interpreted by anyone who was guided by the Holy Spirit (Vance 1975:7). This was a radical departure from Catholic doctrine which relegated Biblical interpretation to the Vatican or learned church scholars. Related to this is the notion of "perfectionism" (Gerrard 1966a:62), or:

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[1] Warburton (1969) makes a strong case for not equating Pentecostal with Holiness traditions. He states that (Ibid., p. 130): "Despite the common theological base and forms of anti-worldliness which they share, Pentecostalism and Holiness religion are distinguishable from one another in terms of the

> . . . the belief in the possibility of attaining in this life, despite original depravity, a spiritual state of being, free not only of sinful deeds but also, much more importantly, of sinful desires. This state of holiness is not a long and gradual development to be achieved through monastic asceticism and meditation, or through assiduous cultivation of a virtuous life, but it is attained instantaneously, through the direct operation ofthe Holy Spirit, a replication of the experiences of the apostles on the day of Pentecost . . . The experience is variously called 'santification', 'regeneration', 'the new birth', the 'Baptism of the Spirit', or 'the second blessing'. It frequently follows the emotional upheavals attending the experience of 'conversion' in which the individual, awakened from the spiritual indifference, agonizingly repents his sins and seeks and finds God's forgiveness.

The perfectionist notion of a second blessing ". . . in which the Holy Spirit cleansed the believer from inbred tendencies" (Ranaghan 1974:3) derives from John Wesley's idea of "Christian Perfection". Early Methodism emphasized two ". . . definite experiences of grace: first, an assurance of salvation, and second, an assurance of sanctification" (Ibid.). It was the notion of a second blessing ". . . in which the Holy Spirit cleansed the believer from inbred tendencies toward sin, which distinguished Methodism from the rest of

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types of religious experience they emphasize". Specifically, the Holiness emphasis is more "inward and subjective" (Ibid., p. 132) whereas, the Pentecostal (taking its tone from the Biblical account of the day of Pentecost) is more outwardly emotional and expressive, emphasizing glossolalia and other signs and manifestations of the spirit. Groups like serpent-handling, however, combine a Holiness ascetic with a Pentecostal emphasis (Warburton 1972, personal conversation). Members at the church refer to themselves as "Holiness people". Therefore, when referring to serpent-handlers, the terms will be used interchangably.

Protestantism" (ibid.).[2] Wesley's notion of perfection established a basis for the Holiness orientation. As summarized by Warburton (1969:131-132):

> Holiness religion appears to have grown around a doctrinal innovation, for, although it had numerous pietistic and perfectionistic antecedents dating back to the Apostolic era, it can be directly traced to John Wesley's original teaching on 'Entire Santification' as an instantaneous experience which is deeper than, and subsequent to, conversion and attainable by faith in the Holy Ghost. . . It is important to note, however, that Entire Sanctification is essentially inward and subjective. Unlike glossolalia and other physical manifestations, only the believer knows that he or she had received it.

The notion of perfectionism was anathema to traditional Catholic teaching which was influenced by Thomas Aquinas, who held that, ". . . holiness could be achieved only by a select few of the clergy leading a life of meditation and monastic asceticism (Gerrard 1966a:65). Consequently, the ". . . church viewed the participants in emotional perfectionistic movements as heretical, as 'possessed by the devil', and treated them accordingly" (ibid.). Also, "the Lutheran and Calvinistic churches of the Reformation condemned the Anabaptists, Mennonites and other sects with strong perfectionistic leanings" (Ibid., p. 66). Thus, some writers refer to such groups as "the left wing of the Reformation" (Young

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[2] Regarding Wesley's perfectionism, Niebuhr (1949:175) writes (in a footnote) that: ". . . Wesley was too much of a realist to be able to deny the reality of those sinful elements in the life of the redeemed which are neither fully conscious nor yet completely unconscious. . . There is thus a conflict in Wesley's thought between his realism and his defective doctrine of sin. . . He resolved the conflict by a rather neat theological device. He declared that there was no moment in life

1974:84).

Following from the Anabaptists,[3] who insisted that infant baptism was insufficient, is the notion that only those who have reached sufficient age to intentionally consent to the rite should be eligible. Implicit in this is the idea that church membership should be "intentional" or "voluntary" (Littell 1964:46).

Although the basic theological roots of serpent-handling can be traced to the Old World, one must look to the series of emotional revivals that swept across the United States between 1734 and 1900. Components of the religion's style developed out of these revival cycles. The more important revival cycles included: (1) "The Great Awakening", in New England (1734 to 1740); (2) revivals in Virginia (1773 to 1776); (3) the Kentucky Revivals (1798 to 1810); and, (4) the Camp Creek Revivals or "The Latter Rain Movement" (1886 to 1900) (Bloch-Hoell 1964:7; Synan 1971:21-84; Clark 1949:100; Hollenweger 1972:47-48; Calley 1965:150-154). While all of these revival

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for which real perfection could be claimed except the moment just before death. His disciples have not always had the prudence to set the same limits.

[3] The term Anabaptist was actually a misnomer. Followers of this tradition did not really advocate re-baptism (as the label implies). Rather, they believed ". . . that infant baptism did not constitute true baptism and that they were not in reality re-baptizers" (Littell 1964:XV). Littell (Ibid) concludes that: "The name was so conveniently elastic that it came to be applied to all those who stood out against authoritative state religion."

cycles (as well as many minor ones) are important in the development of a particular mode of worship, discussion will be restricted to the Kentucky Revivals and the Camp Creek Revivals as they best exemplify selected characteristics of the religious milieu out of which serpent-handling emerged.

The Kentucky Revivals took place between 1798 and 1810 in the south central part of the state near Bowling Green. This series of revivals developed and crystalized the religious style that is characteristic of contemporary serpent-handling, as well as, of the revivals held by diverse denominations from 1800 to the present. Components of the frontier religious style that developed out of these revivals include (Ranaghan 1974:85; Wood 1954:8):

(1) preaching by uneducated men;
(2) use of the institutionalized camp meeting;
(3) festivity and socializing at religious gatherings;
(4) emphasis upon individual experience;
(5) energetic religious participation;
(6) generating of intense religious enthusiasm;
(7) acceptance of a particularly real and vivid supernatural realm;
(8) belief in a deity who could and would intervene miraculously in a person's affairs;
(9) circuit-riding preachers.

In addition to the above characteristics of worship, serpent-handling is heir also to a number of extreme Holiness emphases that were manifested at the Camp Creek Revivals (or the "Latter Rain Movement") in Western North Carolina between 1886 and 1900. Within the emergent Holiness movement of the late 1800's two opposing viewpoints were conspicious. One group held that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit was a personal experience that might, at most, be manifested by spirited praying, shouting, or by some involuntary body movement. The opposing group held that this cleansing experience would be verified by some supernatural sign of holiness, such as speaking in tongues, a dream, or a vision. The Camp Creek Revivials may be viewed as representing the more "sign" oriented, demonstrative variant of the Holiness orientation. In fact, in the South in general, most of the independent Holiness congregations of the late 1800's and early 1900's tended to be more extreme than their counterparts in the North and in urban areas. Such congregations placed greater emphasis on doctrines like "Divine healing, the premillennial second coming of Christ, a 'third blessing' of fire, and puritanical modes of dress" (Synan 1971:75). Following the teachings of Benjamin Hardin Irwin, founder of the "Fire-Baptized Holiness Church" in Iowa in 1895" some Camp Creek participants believed that the second baptism of the Holy Spirit was insufficient; and, perhaps, a fourth, fifth, or even sixth baptism of fire was necessary to complete purification. Specifically, it was believed that the baptism of "dynamite, lyddite, oxide", and other explosives was necessary to salvation (Ibid., p. 61; Hollenweger 1972:48).

Out of the milieu of the Camp Creek Revivals, the Holiness Church of God At Camp Creek developed. This small church was the forerunner of The Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) which was led by A. J. Tomlinson. Serpent-handling probably developed within the early Church of God.[4] The Camp Creek and early Church of God tradition--with its emphasis on religious innovation, strident pursuit of Biblical fundamentals in belief and practice, reliance on signs and experience, isolated rural nature, use of travelling evangelists; and fluid manner in which groups formed, merged, separated, and dissolved--provided a favorable intellectual and social environment for the emergence of serpent-handling.

To this point in the discussion, the remote and immediate religious antecedents of serpent-handling have been examined. I have had two purposes for doing this: one, to place serpent-handling into its larger theological contexts so that it is not viewed as isolated, aberrant, or bizarre, but rather as an outgrowth of a long-standing religious emphasis; and, two, to provide a historical base-line against which members' practices of recounting their religious history can be contrasted. The details of serpent-handling's origin and development will now be examined.[5]

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[4] Regarding Tomlinson, La Barre (1962a:31) reports that: "Even more vexing ethnographically is the report of a snake-handling group started in the hamlet of Cherokee, North Carolina, by A. J. Tombleson or Tomlinson in 1903, and now led in other states by his sons". However, there is no evidence of serpent-handling at Cherokee or Camp Creek. There seems to be no doubt, however, that serpent-handling was practiced in some Church of God congregations after 1909. Vance (1975) discusses this issue in some detail.

[5] This overall discussion does not purport to account for all aspects of the development of the Pentecostal or Holiness movements. Many gaps and wide-ranging generalizations exist in my presentation. The focus has been on those theological positions and selected specific occurences that I considered

THE ORIGINS AND DIFFUSION OF SERPENT-HANDLING

Most scholarly and journalistic sources posit that serpent-handling was first practiced in 1909 by George Went Hensley in Grasshopper, Tennessee (Collins, 1947:1; Kerman 1942:101; Gerrard 1968:22; La Barre 1962a:11,12; Robertson 1950:170,171; Synan 1971:187; Vance 1975:20-29; and others).[6] Hensley was a Church of God evangelist in his early thirties who had been assigned to the community of Grasshopper, Tennessee (near Church of God headquarters at Cleveland, Tennessee) (Collins 1947:1,2; Vance 1975:28). Many of the residents of Grasshopper and the surrounding area had already accepted "Holiness" before Hensley initiated serpent-handling there (Ibid.).

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of greatest importance in serpent-handling's development. Conspicuous by its absence, for example, is a discussion of the Azusa Street services in Los Angeles in 1906. Although the Camp Creek revivals pre-dated this, it was the events at Azusa Street that crystalized the Pentecostal focus on glossolalia. Or, the Rev. Fox Parham of Kansas City, Kansas had an effect on the development of the Pentecostal movement. According to Vance (1975:17-18) he was the first person to isolate glossolalia as being the "only evidence of the Holy Ghost". Because of this, some view Parham as the founder of the modern Pentecostal movement. These and other influences probably had some effect on the development of serpent-handling, but are overshadowed by the regional events of the "radical" Holiness movement.

Also, for the purposes of this study, I did not present information of the controversies regarding serpent-handling that developed in the Church of God. See Vance (1975) for a detailed discussion of this topic.

[6] Stekert is not fully convinced of the 1909 date for the religion's origin and is of the opinion, (in agreement with La Barre's unsubstantiated sources) that the practice first occured sometime earlier. Stekert has not yet found evidence to substantiate this view (personal interview, Oct. 1972, Berkeley, California).

Hensley, ". . . a deeply religious" person, became disturbed upon reading and re-reading Mark 16:18--"And They shall take up serpents" (Collins 1947:102). Since Hensley had not taken up serpents, it was clear to him that if he was to gain "eternal life," he must be willing to obey this direct command of the Lord (Vance Loc cit.). So on a summer day in 1909, Hensley sought out "serpents" on top of White Oak Mountain. As depicted by Collins (op. cit., p. 2):[7]

> In a great rocky gap in the mountainside he found what he sought, a large rattlesnake. He approached the reptile, and disregarding its buzzing, blood-chilling warning, knelt a few feet away from it and prayed loudly into the sky for God to remove his fear and to anoint him with 'the power.' Then suddenly with a shout he leaped forward and grasped the reptile and held it in trembling hands.

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[7] The accuracy of Collins' account is uncertain as his reconstruction was necessarily based on oral reports. During the late 1940's, Collins interviewed a number of people in Grasshopper Valley, including some of Hensley's early followers or their descendents, at the Dolley Pond Church of God with Signs Following (formed in 1943). As Collins (1947:4,17) includes photographs of Hensley it is reasonable to suppose that he talked to him about the religion's origin. That Hensley accepted credit for the initiation of serpent-handling is corroborated by Kerman (1942:101). Kerman, writing of his visit to the Pine Mountain Church of God (Kentucky) in 1938 as a reporter for the St. Louis Post Dispatch, stated that:

> "I met that night a man who said he had originated snake-handling as a religious rite. He was G. W. Hensley, pastor of the East Pineville Church of God, near Harlan. He said he had introduced the practice twenty-eight years before in Sale Creek, Tennessee." (This Post-Dispatch photo-essay is considered to be the first extensive photo coverage of serpent-handling.)

Similarly, Robertson (1950:170-171) discussed the religion's origin with Hensley and related an account similar to Collins' description: "In 1909 on White Oak Mountain near Grasshopper, Tennessee, George Hensley, already a follower of the 'Holiness', had first pondered over some verses he had heard from the last chapter of the Gospel of Mark, verses 17,18:. . .

At first, Hensley held services in the homes of the faithful and in "improvised brush arbors" in Grasshopper Valley (Collins 1947:2). Services allegedly were held in the valley for some ten years without incident of snakebite. During the tenth year of the group's existence, Garland Defriese was bitten by a large rattlesnake. Although he (Collins 1947:2):

> . . . recovered after a few weeks . . . the experience dulled his enthusiasm for the practice and snake handling that day lapsed into a state of suspended animation that was to last for 23 years in Grasshopper Community. Cultists continue to refer to Defriese as the 'backslider'.

This was probably the first recorded case of serpent-bite in the short history of the religion.

Although serpent-handling was supposedly discontinued at Sale Creek in Grasshopper Valley until 1943 (Ibid., pp. 2-3), Heneley and his disciples, in the tradition of early Methodist circuit-riding preachers, brought their message to scattered Holiness and Church of God congregations throughout the Southeastern United States. La Barre 1962a:15 states: "Indeed, the early sporadic appearances of the cult appears always to be associated with Hensley and his immediate

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Mr. Hensley felt that the verse was a definite command from the Lord, given after His ressurection. He found a big rattlesnake under a rock, knelt and prayed for 'the power'; then with a shout, he grasped the snake and held it with trembling hands. For the rest of his life he has preached snake-handling, until the cult has spread by word of mouth through the whole Appalachian region, and beyond."

Synan (1971:187) and Vance (1975:17) also lend credence to Hensley being the founder of religious serpent-handling.

followers." Whether La Barre's contention is accurate is open to question. There seems to be little doubt that Hensley initiated relgious serpent-handling in 1909 near Bearchwood, Tennessee; or, that he travelled widely promoting the faith. However, Vance (1975:32-37) provides considerable evidence to suggest that not all serpent-handling in the South can be linked to Hensley or his followers. Vance seems to be suggesting that given the general religious milieu in the South and the propensity for people to interpret the Bible literally, it seems likely that individuals who had not heard of Hensley or of serpent-handling acted independently on Mar 16:18. Vance provides a number of examples to illustrate the point. This view is consistent with Synan's (1971:118) notion that Pentecostalism in general is a "movement without a man".

Deciding about specific cases is diffucult. For example, La Barre (1962a:12) credits Hensley with introducing snake-handling at the Church of God at Pine Mountain in the early 1930's. According to La Barre the practice was not fully regularized until . . . "Browning . . . became pastor at Pine Mountain and shortly afterward (re)introduced snake-handling" (Ibid). Browing continues to serve as pastor of the Pine Mountain church and serpent-handling is still practiced there. Hensley's role in initiating serpent-handling at the church is open to question, however. Rev. Browning (July 18, 1971) for example, told me that he initiated the handling of serpents at the Pine Mountain Church in 1931 and that it was the first church in that vicinity to engage in the practice. Browning claimed that he received his inspiration to handle serpents in a vision and did not mention Hensley's influence. As Browning described it to reporters from Foxfire magazine (1973:6):

> I was 34 years old. Th'Lord called me t'preach this. He began t'reveal th'faith t'me. It was through th'revelation of HIm. It was revealed t'me in this Bible when it said t'take 'em up; and I was preachin' one day, and I didn't know that verse was to us. I though it was to th'Apostles. And th'Lord revealed it t'me, and then I got t'preachin' it. And they brought one one time and said, 'Can we bring it in?' And somebody said, 'Yeah, bring it in.' And they said, 'Th' preacher'll have t'tell us.' And I went out t'em and hollered to'em t'bring it in.

The Foxfire article maintains that the church . . . "was founded in 1931--two years after its founding, the members began to handle serpents" (Ibid.). Cobb (1965:56) who worked in the Pine Mountain Community over a thirty-year period states that . . . "the sect was founded in 1932 by its present preacher and leader."

Although the exact extent of Hensley's influence in serpent-handling is uncertain, there is little doubt that he was an active evangelist who travelled widely throughout the South. An overview of Hensley's travels, and related events, follows.

On August 18, 1935 some five hundred of Hensely's followers gathered in Ramsey Virginia (Vance 1975:30). During the service a twelve year old boy grabbed a snake and

and decapitated it. A near riot ensued and state and local police were called in. The resultant coverage in the New York Times (August 19, 1935:17) and the Bristol Tennessee News Bulletin (August 19, 1935:7) was the first-afforded Hensley (ibid).

On May 4, 1936, Hensley conducted a meeting in northern Florida at Bartow at which ". . . an Alfred Weaver was bitten and died" (Ibid., pp. 30-31). Hensley's presence was also noted when Reverent T. Anderson was bitten on September 27, 1936, at Jonesville, Virginia (Ibid.). Also, during his tenure as pastor of the East Pineville Church of God, Hensley and two others were arrested and charged with disturbing the peace (Ibid.).

During the summer of 1938, Hensley's name appeared in a law suit against three members of the Pine Mountain Church of God. The suit was filed by John Day, a local farmer whose wife had participated in snake-handling against his wishes.

Hensley was next in the news during the 1940's in connection with serpent-handling and resulting legal difficulties at the newly formed Dolley Pond Church of God with Signs Following in Grasshopper, Tennessee. In the spring of 1943, Raymond Hays, a follower of Hensley from Kentucky, brought a box of serpents to Grasshopper Valley, re-introducing serpent-handling there. Shortly thereafter, the Dolley Pond Church was formed with Tom Harden, a local born preacher, as pastor (Collins 1947:5-6; La Barre 1962a:

15-16; Vance 1975:84-87). La Barre (*Ibid.*) asserts that the Dolley Pond Church ". . . was the mother church of the snake-handling in the South." As previously discussed, Vance (1975) provides considerable evidence against the complete acceptance of this view.

On September 3, 1947 at a brush arbor service near Daisy, Tennessee, Lewis Ford, a Dolley Pond member, was bitten by a large rattlesnake and died 70 minutes later (Collins 1947:21). Ford's death focused attention on the church. In fact, over 2,000 people attended the funeral in rural Grasshopper Valley and, according to Collins (*Ibid.*), ". . . many more were turned back by the traffic which jammed the narrow Grasshopper road for miles along either approach to the church." During the funeral, Rev. Raymond Hays placed the snake that had bitten Ford in the dead man's casket and was himself bitten. Hays allegedly did not suffer from the bite (*Time* 1945:23-24).

Shortly after Ford's death, George Hensley and Tom Harden conducted a serpent-handling tent revival inside the city limits of nearby Chattanooga. Police intervened; shot the serpent and arrested Harden and Hensley. At the preliminary hearing, held the next day, the men were fined $50 each but charges were subsequently dropped (Collins 1947: 22-23).

A few months later, Clint Jackson died of a rattlesnake bite that he received during services at Daisy, Tennessee.

Jackson was not a member of the Dolley Pond church, but his death had profoundimplications for the Dolley Pond group. Namely, this second Tennessee death aroused anti-snake-handling sentiment in the state and catalyzed the drafting of the February 4, 1947 Tennessee anti-snake-handling law. On February 28, 1947 the bill passed in the Tennessee House by a vote of 75 to 9 (Ibid., p. 24).[8]

On August 9, 1948, Harvey Bell of Lindale, Georgia died of a rattlesnake bite received during services at the Dolley Pond Church. On August 13, 1948, serpent-handling was officially discontinued at the church. W. L. Ford, a church trustee, told newspaper reporters that, ". . . 'he does not have faith enough' to handle snakes, and 'I am going to quit it" (Chattagooga Times, August 3, 1947). Nevertheless, Reece Ramsey, a lay leader at Dolley Pond, died of a snakebite at a meeting in Dade County, Georgia (Vance 1975:102) and in 1962 Mrs. Ella Bee Harden Michaels was bitten by a rattlesnake at a service in a private home near the Grasshopper Community (News-Free Press June 19, 1962).[9]

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[8] Tennessee was not the first state to pass legislation against serpent-handling. Kentucky passed such a law in 1940 and Georgia passed a similar law in 1941. Georgia's law was by far the strictest in that it made ". . . serpent-handling a felony punishable by imprisonment for one to twenty years" (Tripp 1975:22). The law also had a provision for the death penalty. "In the event that death is caused to a person on account of the violation of this Act by some other person . . ." (Ibid.) (Original source Georgia Laws, 1941:449). Virginia passed an anti-snake-handling law January 29, 1947 (Vance 1975: 52). West Virginia appears to be the only state that does not have legal prohibitions against snake-handling. State laws against the practice usually resulted from particularly noteworthy incidents of death from snakebite. Alabama law passed in 1950, Florida law in 1953, North Carolina law 1949. Not prohibited in South Carolina, except by local ordinance (Tripp op. cit., pp. 83-84).

George Went Hensley died of a rattlesnake bite received during a service at an "open-air arbor" near Altha, Florida. Hensley was seventy years old (Chattanooga Times, July 25, 1955).

In looking at the origin and development of serpent-handling in general I have emphasized events and churches involving George Hensley, a reputed founder of the religion. Although this history of serpent-handling is far from complete, it is illustrative of some of the people, events, localities, legal difficulties, religious style, larger interactional patterns between churches, means of dissemination, and causes of church demise. Hensley and the Dolley Pond Church were emphasized in order to focus on the remote antecedents of The Holiness Church of God in Jesus Name. As will be discussed subsequently, the Holiness Church of God in Jesus Name was established by former members of the Sand Hill Church of God near Del Rio, Tennessee, where serpent-handling was introduced by evangelists from the Holiness Church of God in Jesus Name at Big Stone Gap, Virginia. The Big Stone Gap Church was founded in the 1930's by evangelists from Kentucky, as were numerous other groups in Virginia and West Virigina (personal interview with Rev. Paul Stidham, Big Stone Gap, December, 1974). As Hensley and his followers did considerable proselytizing during the 1930's from Pineville, Kentucky into Virginia and other states, a tenuous link between George Hensley and the Newport church can be inferred.

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[9] Vance (1975:102) notes that as recently as 1972 serpents were handled in homes of the Dolley Pond members. Similarly, it is interesting to note that Burl Barbee, a former Dolley Pond participant, along with other believers, continues to handle serpents in Chattanooga and sometimes participates at churches in Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia (interview with Rev. Liston Pack and Rev. Alfred Ball, Newport Tennessee December 1974.

I have purposely not dealt extensively with the history of serpent-handling in Georgia or Alabama as Vance (1975) devotes at least two chapters to this and Tripp (1975) provides considerable detail on one or two churches near Atlanta. Moreover, after a point, the presentation of detailed cases contributes little to an understanding of serpent-handling, as the basic events and patterns are, for the most part, replicated in all of the churches.

With regard to the more recent development of the religion, it appears that serpent-handling is growing in the Appalachian South, as well as Northern and Midwestern industrial areas where saints have migrated. This is an interesting trend as a number of writers had predicted the imminent demise of the religion. Nichol (1966:157) wrote that:

> . . . since snake-handling seems to occur in the obscure and remote areas of the South its ethos is essentially rural and thus yearly in greater conflict with the increasing urbanism of the 'New South', and since it is continuously entangled with the law in the Southeast, its extinction appears to be inevitable.

In a similar vein, La Barre (personal communication, December 15, 1971) stated that: "To my knowledge, snake-handling is still practiced only in one or two remote places in the

Appalachians such as Big Stone Gap, near Wise, Virginia, and perhaps near the Scrabble Creek area."[10]

To this point in the discussion, the history of serpent-handling has been examined. This has been an incomplete overview, as written records are lacking. As summarized by La Barre (1962a:32):

> Because of this sporadic diffusion into widely separated rural areas, because it occurs in obscure and remote places, and because mostly illiterate cultists are in any case more interested in dionysian experience than in appolonian historical scholarship, we must expect some incompleteness in our study which only further direct field information can remedy. Very probably new information will continue to emerge concerning local snake-handling groups.

A MEMBERS' HISTORY OF SERPENT-HANDLING

The following excerpt from an interview that I conducted with Rev. William A. Ball, founder and pastor of Jesus Christ Apostolic Church near Newport, Tennessee, illustrates the type of accounts members give concerning the religion's origin (Tape recorded December 1974):

> This faith's been goin' on right up through time because its inthe Bible and there's always been a people that practiced the Bible and, I have talked with people who knew of other people, who knew still other people that just goes way, way, way, way back and there's been somebody practicin' taking up serpents for just as far back as you can go when you begin to talk to people in this faith. They can keep tellin' you about people before them, grandfathers and great grandfathers that were doin' it and incidently, even in the encyclopedia you can read about a tribe of Indians who had what they called a snake dance and this was a, religious ceremony, and that goes far, far back behin 1900 and 09, and I think maybe that that's just when people first begin to take notice that

> somethin' like that was goin' on. In my opinion, and I think that I have adequate proof for that opinion, a serpent-handling--or takin'up serpents I prefer to say because that's the way the Bible said it--has been goin' on for hundreds of years. All the way right back to Bible days.

This view of serpent-handling's past rests on and is ordered by religious premises concerning the meaning of history and is reflective of a "kairos" emphasis in which ". . . a large view ofthe whence and where of the human race and of man's place in nature" (Pruyser 1968:217) is taken. This is not to suggest that chronology ("chronos") is of no importance to saints or that conscious deception is practiced. Rather, Brother Alfred's account of the past must be comprehended as it relates to serpent-handling as an oral tradition. Specifically, oral accounts or "testimonies", can always be seen as a "mirage of reality" (Vansina 1965:76). This is so, because oral testimonies provide a means of creating and reinforcing cultural values. In the case of serpent-handlers, such accounts establish and emphasize the group's original "charter" given by Jesus in "Apostolic times" as well as its continuity in time. This symbolically provides the religion with a time depth and sense of destiny that ordinarily would be lacking if George Hensley was its acknowledged founder.

Thus, Brother Alfred establishes the reasonableness of his account by saying that: "Yes, this faith's been goin' on right on up through time because its in the Bible and there's always been a people that practiced the Bible" (December 1974).

Implicit in this reasoning is the notion that Biblical injunctions and prophecies are carried out and fulfilled. This view is elaborated by Brother Elzie Preast, a serpent-handler from Scrabble Creek, West Virginia (in Dickinson & Benziger 1974:127-128):

> I don't handle them every time. I really don't feel like it's necessary every time for me. But it does say, 'They shall take up serpents'. And Jesus is the one's doing the talking. Said, 'They shall take them up.' Well, I've got to do it, or somebody's got to do it, or else it makes Jesus out a liar, because if I tell you you shall go out that door, it means that you've got to go out there, one way or the other. Now listen how it reads. 'And these signs shall follow them that believe'. Shall. Now if it said, 'if you feel led to handle them, if you believe to handle them,' it'd be kind of different. But it says, 'These signs shall follow'. See, it's just like the Holy Ghost speaking in tongues. It don't come any other way. And when I read it says they shall speak with new tongues, they've got to do like it says. But the scriptures said that they shall pick up serpents, and somebody has to do that. If we don't do it, Jesus can raise up a people that will do it. If it's the least baby here tonight. If it's this little baby, if we won't do it, he'll raise them little children up here in our midst. Or maybe somebody that's never been born. But he's going to have somebody that will do it. If we don't do it, he'll have somebody that will do it.

Following Brother Preast's logic, Rev. Ball's reference to the Hopi snake dance provides evidence of the scripture's fulfillment and of the religion's unbroken continuity. Similarly, in emphasizing that serpent-handling had been practiced "all through time," Brother Jimmy Williams noted that some of the Pilgrims migrated to the new world because serpent-handlers were persecuted in Britain (interview December 15, 1972).

The logic of the above accounts is similar to that of the "archaic" traditions examined by Eliade (1959:21) in which all activity was judged as meaningful only to the extent that it related to ". . . a divine model, an archetype". Specifically:

> . . . the archaic man, acknowledges no act which has not been previously posited and lived by someone else, some other being who was not a man. What he does has been done before. His life is the ceaseless repetition of gestures initiated by others.
> This conscious repetition of given paradigmatic gestures reveals an original ontology. The crude product of nature, the object fashioned by the industry of man, acquire their reality, their identity, only to the extent of their participation in a transcendent reality. The gesture acquires meaning, reality, solely to the extent to which it repeats a primordial act (p. 5).
> . . . Each of the examples cited in the present chapter reveals the same 'primitive ' ontological conception: an object or an act becomes real only insofar as it imitates or repeats an archetype. Thus, reality is acquired solely through repetition or participation; everything which lacks an exemplary model is 'meaningless', i.e., it lacks reality (p. 34).

The following statement made by Brother Burl Barbee of Chattanooga, Tennessee (former Dolley Pond participant) can be used to illustrate Eliade's assertions (in the native stone, July 5, 1973):

> Some people said to me they didn't believe Jesus picked up snakes. Well, I don't believe Jesus would tell me to pick up snakes if He wouldn't do it Himself. Oh, Lord, I long to see the day when they quit calling me a lowdown, no good Jesus snake-handler.

Similarly, Rev. Jimmy Williams emphasized that: "The Apostles took up serpents" (field notes Nov. 23, 1972). Or, as Brother Liston Pack affirmed regarding speaking in tongues (tape recorded Ausut 20, 1972):

> "Amen, that can just be done, amen. On Pentecost they spoke in other tongues, alleluya to God, amen. . ."

For serpent-handlers, the King James Bible serves as an "exemplary model" (Eliade 1959:34). For example, Brother Alfred stated (tape recorded August 20, 1972):

> Amen, during this revival, amen, I want you to come and I wantyou to follow right along with me when I'm preaching, amen, and if, amen, if I tell you the truth believe, and if I don't, don't you believe it. If I tell you something that's not in that book, don't you believe it. Amen, if it's in there, you better believe it. Amen, you sure better believe it. Amen, and, a you do the same for any other preacher that you listen at.

Regarding the Bible, Jimmy Williams states (tape recorded December 10, 1972):

> Amen, I promise you one thing, that I won't do nothing outside the Word of God. The things that I say, amen, I can put my finger right on it. Bless the Lord! And read 'em to you. I don't believe that a preacher ought to bring you nairy thing that he can't lay his thumb on. Bless God! Amen.

Or, as affirmed by Brother Clyde and Brother Lester (tape recorded December 12, 1972): ". . . it is between each lid of the holy Word . . . We don't add, we don't take away."

In the above cases, then, it is argued that if a belief or practice cannot be cited verbatim in the Bible, it lacks validity. In terms of the meaning of history, this reliance on primordial events has interesting implications. As seen by Eliade (1959:35):

> Thus we perceive a second aspect of primitive ontology: insofar as an act (or an object) acquires a certain reality . . . through the repetition of certain paradigmatic gestures, and acquires it through that alone, there is an implicit abolition of profane time,

> of duration, of 'history'; and he who reproduces the exemplary gesture thus finds himself transported into the mythical epoch in which its revelation took place.

In the Christian tradition, for example, John 14:12 states: "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also." In other words, ". . . he who believes in Jesus can do what He did; his limitations and impotence are abolished" (Eliade op. cit., p. 23). As seen by Brother Billy Jay Forrester (in Pelton & Garden 1974:25): "Because it' in the Bible . . . because Jesus told His disciples to do it, I believe we can do it too."

To this point in the discussion, we have seen that for serpent-handlers history serves as exemplary functions ". . . providing examples of ideal types" (Vansina 1965:106). It is on this basis that serpent-handlers refer to one another as "saints", and conceive of themselves as a "separated people," "God's people," or a "peculiar people". Through the use of this nomenclature, serpent-handlers are, in effect, asserting their close affinity with the saints and Apostles of old. This identification with saints and apostles is reflected in the following incidents. Alfred Ball, for example, (fieldnotes July 31, 1973) posited, that: ". . . we shouldn't be surprised that we suffer from serpent-bite, as the apostles were often persecuted just for preaching. We are promised in the Scriptures that God's people will suffer." In a similar vein, Liston Pack stated that: ". . . many preachers say that Apostles aren't around anymore" (August 5, 1972, fieldnotes).

People in the congregation laughed at Liston's suggestion and a preacher or two proclaimed that Apostles are "still around". Saints in the congregation responded with a resounding, 'amen."

In some respects, saints' ordering of time can be compared to medieval conceptions as exemplified in Langland's Piers The Ploughman (circa 1377). As seen by Kaske (1968:327), for example, Langland's style of presentation served:

> . . . as a kind of double-surfaced mirror reflecting the essential truth of both past and future--just as, according to medieval commentary, the essential truth of both past and future is reflected in the letter of the New Testament.

Goodridge's (1966:12-17) commentary on Langland's work can be used to focus on serpent-handlers' general orientation to the past:

> . . . the form allows various different time-scales and with them different levels of meaning, to operate side by side, or be superimposed by one another . . . it is no regular step-by-step progress. It is as irregular and unpredictable as life itself. . . In Book XI the poet ironically allows forty-five years of the dreamer's life to drop out as if they had never existed, so that he passes in a moment from the struggle of early manhood to those of old age. . .
>
> Langland's willingness to follow, at times, wherever the spirit leads--a characteristic of most medieval devotional writing--occasions many digressions, stopping-shots and unexpected transitions. The patter is incomplete in parts, yet unified on a higher level as the dreamer becomes caught up in the mystery of Christ and his spokesman, Piers.

As is shown throughout this study, serpent-handlers' employ methods similar to those used by Langland in the fourteenth century. In their oral accounts of past events they often employ a non-sequential time progression. As well, reports of dreams and visions sometimes are juxtaposed in the same account. Numerous side tangents are developed. Accounts can differ from teller to teller, depending on the immediate purpose of the account, audience, religious truth being emphasized, differential knowledge of the events recounted, etc.

In this section, selected folk accounts of serpent-handling's origin have been examined and viewed as a means of creating a sense of an ongoing community of saints with historical continuity and practical affinity with Jesus and the Apostles. In looking at these accounts of community, it is necessary to realize that in many contexts it is unnecessary for the recounter to relate all that he knows on a particular topic as he assumes that participant-hearers will share similar background knowledge and will fill in the gaps in the narratives. Also, the full story of the religion's past is not ordinarily recounted in any one service or conversation. Rather, bits and pieces of it are selectively presented during sermons, casual conversations, interviews with researchers, etc. and, at these times, are told to illustrate or give credance to the overall thrust of the sermon or other activity at hand. The principle here is that all oral performance must be seen in terms of the purposes at hand, rather than as part of a fixed textual repertory. By examining story-telling from this persepctive, much can be learned about the selective rendering of accounts as a means toward the creation of a community of saints.

Concerning this, Goodridge (1966:18) raises a point about Piers The Ploughman that has applicability to serpent-handlers:

> . . . the secret of the poem's appeal to a modern reader may lie partly in this irregularity of construction, for, instead of giving up a finished picture of the Christian view of life, it registers all our 'uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, and shows a continuing process of thought: truth is something to be appropriated to oneself, not merely understood by the mind.

It is in the notion that truth is something to be "appropriated to oneself", rather than merely intellectually perceived, that we can see theimportance of saints' time reckoning practices. Namely, for saints history is not a series of completed, discrete events, but is an ongoing process that they are part of. A saint does not assume a vantage point outside history and view a series of finite closures, but rather stands in a dynamic and ongoing relationship to an assumed destiny that is intricately tied to past, present and future. These truths, as expressed in the unalterable King James Bible, form the starting and finishing point for all contemporary or temporal analysis. Having accepted this premise, saints need not be concerned with the literal details of lineal time sequence from the present to the past. What is important is the truth of the continuity of the Word from the Alpha to the Omega. Thus, mysteries and gaps in the oral record are of little consequence. What is important is the ongoing, unfinished process that will ultimately lead to a heavenly home. As summarized by Hostetler and Huntington (1967:22-23) concerning Hutterites' perceptions of time and history:

> Intermediate between sacred and secular time and history and dreams. For the Hutterites, history is important as a dimension of the presence of God in the world. They are not interested in history in terms of dates on a secular time scale but as steps in the development of the church of God. Therefore, historical events that are unrelated to their own outlook of life are of little meaning to them and even their own history is remembered as it strengthens their faith rather than as a dated sequence of events. This means that there is some fusion of the beginning of Christianity (the historical period of Christ's birth and the writing of the Bible) with the beginning of the Hutterites (during the persecution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the writing of the Hutterite sermons). Miracles of the sixteenth century may be mixed with those of the nineteenth, for the worldly data is unimportant compared with the fact that God 'broke into history'. History is a dimension of secular time that is recalled primarily because it illustrates eternity. . .

CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

Most saints have little or no detailed knowledge or critical understanding of the religion's developmental past. It is precisely through this lack of scientific understanding that an oral tradition such as serpent-handling is able to create a cosmic meaning for its adherents. Historical lore of the origins and development of the religion serves the function of providing participants with a sense of a significant and deep-rooted spiritual tradition that has continuity all the way back to Christ and His original twelve Apostles. Through the telling and retelling of the stories of the origins of serpent-handling and of the feats of saints of the past, as well as of contemporary saints, a sense of the naturalness and inevitability of religious community is created. More specifically, saints' identity as special people who have access to supernatural power, as promised in the Bible, is reinforced and developed.

Examination of the logical structure of the history of serpent-handling as it is conceived by members of the church serves as an initial step for further discussion of the functional role of this kind or aspect of history in creating a community of believers. The following chapter discusses in detail the formation and development of one serpent-handling congregation, The Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name.

CHAPTER III

THE HOLINESS CHURCH OF GOD IN JESUS NAME--DOCUMENTARY PRACTICES, ORIGIN, AND DEVELOPMENT

Although the specifics of time, place, individuals, and events are unique to this church, its formation and development illustrate the patterns and processes generally dealt with in the preceeding chapter. Also of relevance here, are what I term members' "documentary practices" or, the ways in which saints report on, document, and preserve records of their religious activities. These sources include hand-written records, scrapbooks, photographs, and tape recordings made by saints. It is necessary to evaluate saints' documentary practices before proceeding with a discussion of the church's history. In reconstructing the history of The Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name, these "documents" were used to supplement members' oral accounts and my personal observations. As a researcher associated with the church for six of its eight years of existence, I have been in an excellent position to observe, participate in, and record many of the significant events in the group's development. Saints' documentary practices, and the origin and development of The Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name will now be examined.

DOCUMENTARY PRACTICES

Although various studies deal with serpent-handling as an oral tradition (La Barre 1962a: Stekert 1963; Gerrard 1966a; Kane 1974; Tripp 1975; Vance 1975), it is not entirely so. Even though the oral is of primary importance, the written word also plays an integral part in the creation of a community of saints. Most obvious is the fact that the religion is based on a "literal" interpretation of the "Word of God" as it is written in the King James Bible. The bible is frequently read, preached from, argued over, and used as a guide and final authority on most matters. Saints strive to establish the precise meanings of Biblical terms and accounts.[1]

Serpent-handlers use the written word, and related means to document and promulgate their religion through: making news ("publishing the gospel"); preserving photographs, newspaper clippings, research articles, and letters pertaining to the religion (keeping scrapbooks); making tape recordings of church services and personal testimonies; keeping hand written records in family Bibles; and through the printing of "minute books," religious notices and signs, preachers' cards, newspaper advertisements and want ads. Such documentary practices can be seen as important folk methodologies. Through saints' reporting on their own activities, not only are aspects of the present-past preserved, but this may also be seen as a "reflective" means of creating the reality being reported on.[2] Also, as established in Chapter II, serpent-handlers' documentary practices do not correspond to the exact methodologies used by historians and, therefore, it is of interest to elaborate on the uses to which they are employed by the community. In the remainder of this section, five examples of documentary practices will be examined: making news, scarpbooks, tape recordings, hand-written records and printed material.

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[1] However, Stekert (1963:318), reports that: "Bible stories are often told, both in and out of church, in the simplified manner of folktales using much folk speech."

1. Making News ("Published the Gospel")

The biblical justification for what I call making news is found in Mark 13:10: "And the gospel must first be published among all nations." This passage fits into Mark's larger discussion of the conditions that will obtain prior to the second coming of Christ, at the end of the world. Mark wrote that (King James Bible):

> . . . nation shall rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in diverse places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows (Mark 13:8)
>
> . . . they shall deliver you up to councils: and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a

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[2] As stated in Mehan and Wood (1975:12) regarding reflexivity: "Talk itself is reflexive. . . An utterance not only delivers some particular information, it also creates a world in which information itself can appear."

> testimony against them. And the gospel must first be published among all nations. (Emphasis mine) (13:9-10)
>
> . . . for false Christs and false prophets shall rise and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, it it were possible, even the elect. . . (13:22)
>
> But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the utter most part of heaven (13:24-27).

Thus, in endeavoring to "publish" the gospel, saints are, hastening the second coming of Christ and the time when a true community of saints will be possible in "another world." (More will be said about serpent-handling eschatology in later chapters.)

The primary means of publishing the gospel is through newspaper and magazine articles. Reporters and photographers are attracted to the church because of the spectacular religious performances. Once there, saints have an opportunity to provide them with selected information on the religion. Ideally, the resulting news stories will reflect saints views and will serve to publish the "truth" about the "Word."

Saints are usually willing to cooperate with reporters and writers who are interested in portraying the church. For example, Brother Clyde Ray Ricker reportedly invited a Knoxville News-Sentinel reporter and photographer to a church service on June 16, 1971 at which, incidently, Brother Buford

Pack was "serpent-bit." Similarly, on April 15, 1973, Liston Pack and Clyde Ricker conducted a special serpent-handling demonstration in the church-house for the benefit of a Florida based news correspondent and his television camera man for a film documentary that was to be shown internationally. Pack, Ricker, and others in the church discussed the event often and were enthusiastic about its international scope ("even in Europe").

During most of serpent-handling's history, news reporters have been in evidence at many of the churches. This is not to suggest that saints have always welcomed media peoples' intrusions. As reported by Tripp (1975:65) concerning serpent-handlers in a Georgia congregation:

> Newspapers are viewed as a common source of perseuction and ridicule. There have been occasional feature stories about serpent-handling, but most are news stories published following a death, or a prosecution. The stories tend to be sensational and frequently are inaccurate; consequently, the believers rarely trust the press.

In recent years, at The Holiness Church of God in Jesus Name, many saints have become reluctant to talk with reporters and researchers. In the summer of 1973, at the urging of the assistant pastor, Brother Alfred Ball, cameras were barred from the church. (However, the taking of photographs through the open window was not forbidden and the pastor's teenage son willingly directed photographers to the window).

The reluctance of some saints to deal with news people stems from the number of biased and inaccurate stories on the church that have been written in the popular press, especially after the strychnine deaths in 1973. Following the deaths, the church was invaded by media people, researchers, and university students.

Many members, however, continue to see newspaper interviews as an effective means of publishing the gospel and are willing to cooperate, if they have a reasonable expectation that the writer will accurately portray their religion. During the summer of 1973, for example, freelance writers, Robert Pelton and Karen Carden, approached the assistant pastor and proposed to write a sympathetic book on the church. Some saints initially were dubious of the project after the recent "media invasion". Pelton and Carden assured the members that the book would be based primarily on taped interviews with various saints and that Brother Alfred would have some editorial control over the final manuscript before it was published. Consequently, many saints agreed to cooperate. Brother Alfred made available his church scrapbook to the writers, as well as the scrapbook of the late Rev. Jimmy Williams. Brother Ralph Eslinger allowed the writers full use of his unorganized collection of cassette tapes of various church services. Other saints volunteered the use of photographs, etc., and agreed to be interviewed by the writers.

The first book published by Pelton & Carden--Snake-Handlers: God-Fearers? or Fanatics?: A Religious Documentary (1974)--was well received by most saints of the church. Those who did not like the book were people who either did not cooperate with the writers or who had objected to the project from the start. Pelton and Carden (1976) have just released a second book on serpent-handling. The Persecuted Prophets. On the whole, these books contain numerous photographs and consist of various quotations of church members connected by the author's commentary. The writers emphasize that they are not attempting to be analytical, consistent with saint negative reaction to most evaluative research on their religion. Concerning these religious documentaries, Brother Alfred states: (tape recorded, December, 1974):

> . . . its a, very evident when you begin to read these books, a, Tennessee Snake-Handlers and Winston (sic) La Barre's book and what was the other one, a Dew Over Jordan (sic) or somethin' . . . which ever of these books are, are oldest, its an evident fact that the others have picked up their information from these books and in my opinion and, a, neither of these people have ever ever been acquainted with somebody that, a, never been in a service where serpents were taken up because of the things that they say that these people were doin' a, it just doesn't happen. I know hundreds, literally hundreds of people who take up serpents and nothing that any of these people do, though some of them get kind of weird, a nothing that any of them do even approached what these people claim that they saw. A, in my opinion, this is all, a, Dew on Jordan, and a, and a, Tennessee Snake Handlers, which a, has evidently been written, a primarily from newspaper articles probably, and Winston (sic) La Barre's book, these are all just mostly fiction, just somethin' somebody made up because they don't even approach the truth . . . in other words they just say, well this is the way it is and they didn't even bother to document anything . . . and if anybody would care to have something that's, that's a true documentary I'd recommend the, Robert Pelton's new book, the recent book of Robert Pelton's called, They shall take up serpents, a, The Snake Handlers--God Fearers Or Fanatics?. I, I'd recommend that, because I personally know that it is a true documentary and its been well documented all

> across the Southeastern part of the United States, in the churches, from first hand experience with the people, and I was instrumental in, in givin' information to the people and helpin' them to obtain information and what's in that book is the truth. And, this is a true documentary and the others can't be right, because I know hundreds of the people that do it and, none of them even approach the weird things that, that they claim these people do and, the snake-handling is only one small, small, little part. It doesn't taken even as much time as prayin', in their service. . . But La Barre's book and, and The Tennessee Snake-Handlers and all the others, and the newspaper articles, and all the things that have been published about this would lead a person to believe that all they want to do is go to church and handle snakes, if you want to put it that way. . .

Saints are cautious about cooperating with researchers whose work purports to be of a psychological or strictly sociological nature. Saints do, however, often cooperate with students and university faculty members who are doing research providing the researcher can satisfactorily explain the general purposes of the intended work. Brother Alfred, for example, cooperated with Wayne Barrett, a fourth year student at East Tennessee State University who was working on an ethnoscience and video-tape project.[3]

Similarly, other members of The Holiness Church of God in Jesus Name were cooperative and helpful during my "studying." Brother Liston (the pastor), for example, presented me with a "minute book" (a short publication of the church listing beliefs and Scriptural references) that had the following note penciled in on the cover: "Jim you can help, St. Mark 13:10." Of course, as cited above, this passage reads: "And the gospel must first be published among all nations." As I came to Newport from "Alberto, Canada" (sic), my writings would help to fulfill that part of the Scripture.

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[3] The completed tape, "They Shall Take Up Serpents," was included in the Southern Appalachian Video Ethnography Series circulating tape collection at Johnson City, Tennessee, and consists of a twenty-minute interview with Brother Alfred and excerpts from various church services. It is also interesting

Some members of the church are aware of and have read scientific literature on serpent-handling. Scientific explanations of serpent-handling are sometimes mentioned in sermons and testimonies to emphasize the point that the "spiritual" cannot be understood "in the carnal mind" and to show how "the world" can be counted on to misrepresent "God's people." Brother Alfred, for example, illustrates saints use of scientific literature in this excerpt from a letter that he wrote to me (January 17, 1973):

> . . . But it seems that all of these writers come up with some strange conclusions because they try to explain the spiritual things with carnal reasoning. And the scripture teaches that the carnal mind is in enmity against God. It is not subject to God neither indeed can it be, (not subject to the law of God) Romans 8:7. . . And what is psychology except the reasoning of mens' carnal minds? Psychologist's hysteria was the result of suppressed sexual desires. So this explains La Barre's insenuation (sic) that men who take up serpents are secretly trying to seduce the women in the church. If he had bothered to talk to some of the sincere women in the church he would quickly have found that they couldn't be seduced by man or devil. . .

Scientific accounts as well as distorted news stories are of considerable importance, then, in the maintenance of a

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to note that the preceeding excerpt from my interview with Brother Alfred was part of a lengthy taped interview for a monograph that I am writing fro the Video Ethnography Series to accompany Barrett's video tapes. In effect, Brother Alfred was collaborating in the preparation of an analysis of a religious documentary that he was already largely featured in.

community of saints. Obvious distortions are reportable within the group and can serve as the basis of many sermons and testimonies emphasizing the "correct" views and interpretations. This defining and redefining of the "correct" position is important in the ongoing creation of a group as it serves as a means of more precisely formulating the belief system and of creating a specific group identity. Making news in general provides an effective means of establishing a unique boundedness of the community and of emphasizing the notion of a being a "separated people," a "peculiar people"--of maintaining a we-they dichotomy.

Making news is also an effective way of establishing wider social contacts for serpent-handlers, both with saints and with sinners. News stories on the church have attracted religious people of mahy persuasions to "snake hollow" as well as informing serpent-handlers in other localities of the church's existence. The media coverage of the two brothers' deaths in April, 1973 prompted serpent-handlers from Ohio and Kentucky to visit the church, in both cases for the first time. The same news stories inspired a Holiness preacher from Winston-Salem, North Carolina; Pentecostals from Wisconsin; the leader of a well-known southern gospel group from Nashville, Tennessee; and, many others to visit the church. Many of these contacts initiated ongoing relationships with other serpent-handling centers. The leader of the Nashville gospel group began writing a religious book on the church in which he planned to "accurately" portray the intense spirituality of the saints.[4]

As a result of world wide news coverage of church events, the pastor and assistant pastor have received numerous letters from all parts of the United States, Canada, and occasionally from Britain, Australia, New Zealand, The Phillipines, and India. Regarding these letters and the syndicated news story that they were a response to Brother Liston (field notes November 17, 1972):

> . . . talked about the last days, coming when people start writing about the church, as the Word will reach all across the world before the end. Liston also mentioned that he was spending about 80¢ a day answering all the mail that came in after the article appeared. It took him weeks to do it. He wished that more mail had come in. . .

Some letters contain generous cash contributions or offers of free legal aid, while other people send religious tracts or articles on serpent-handling. Letters also comment on the obvious sincerity of believers and offer the saints encouragement in their legal battles. Still other letters condemn serpent-handling and attempt to discredit members. These letters, like the negative or inaccurate articles cited above, are reportable and form the basis of sermons and conversations emphasizing the "God's people-persecution" theme. Positive letters and cash donations are also discussed as evidence of the pervasiveness of God's message.

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[4] With respect to interaction, news stories about serpent-handling can also serve as a catalyst to county sheriffs to "crack down" on the practice. The resulting encounters provide saints with an additional context in which to bear witness for the "Word" through suffering the "persecution" of imprisonment like the Apostles and saints of old.

Finally, making news is important in the creation of a community of saints as it provides a means through which saints can see their activities reflected and "writ" large. News making is an integral part of North American society. The media not only reflect reality, but also are involved in the creation of a larger facticity for that which it reports. One of the main criteria for making news is reportability--that which creates attention and arouses interest. Although serpent-handling is numerically insignificant in the United States, it is afforded a disproportionate amount of media coverage. This over-reporting of a geographically and numerically restricted phenomenon tends to create the impression of a much larger significance, of an established reality, that is given additional verification through such powerful means as radio, television, and documentary film.

Within the larger communities in which saints live and work, news stories can transform individual saints into local celebrities. For example, once when I was dining with Rev. Liston Pack (1973) at a truck stop near Knoxville (some fifty miles from the church), he was recognized by a waitress who had seen his photograph in a local newspaper. She immediately informed the other employees of the "personage" in their midst. Similarly, Liston reported that (fieldnotes July 2, 1972):

> He drove a load of steel to Ann Arbor Michigan where an employee at the terminal said, 'You're Liston Pack, the truck driver who handles snakes.' The worker had read about Liston in a newspaper article. It is partially through such encounters that the reality of the religion is reflected, made manifest, and given a greater credence through its recognition by a larger audience.5

2. Scrapbooks

One by-product of making news is the scrapbooks that many saints keep, containing news articles in which they or the church are featured, 8" x 10" photographs provided by journalists, religious tracts and articles received through the mail, positive letters about the faith from non-members, photographs taken by saints, and miscellaneous materials pertaining to the church or religious matters in general. When visiting the homes of serpent-handlers one is impressed by these scrapbooks-albums. Tripp (1975), and Vance (1975) mention that scrapbooks are also kept by serpent-handlers in Georgia and Alabama. Usually, those who actually "take up serpents" are more likely to have albums as they are personally featured in a number of articles and photographs.

Saints readily show these albums to visitors and provide appropriate commentary about each item included in their collections. Often particular items will remind a saint of the time that he was converted, first "took up serpents," or some other event of significance in his religious development

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[5] The fact that Liston has appeared on local talk shows, as well as on a syndicated show from Detroit, lends further support to my argument.

from sinner to saint. Or, other items are reminiscent of the first days of The Holiness Church of God in Jesus Name or of some other church in which they formerly worshipped.

An interesting aspect of these scrapebooks-photo albums is the way that they are organized. Materials are often not dated and usually not arranged chronologically. Items seem to be included as they are acquired or as they best fit in the spaces provided. Sometimes, saints will purchase an album after years of keeping their materials in a large envelope. Scrapbooks may contain items that are not strictly pertinent to the church, clippings on non-religious snake-lore, articles on the "fallacy" of evolution, other religions, etc. Thus, for example, Brother Alfred wrote, concerning his scrapbook, (letter, January 17, 1973):

> Thank you for the zerox (sic) copies for my scarpbook (sic). I am always interested in getting anything of a religious nature or in other words concerning the religious ofthe world for my book, as I like to study the doctrines that are out of the ordinary way of worship.

In attempting to use these albums as sources of historical documentation, the researcher is frustrated by the fact that many newspaper articles are not identified by date and source. Although this may be frustrating to the researcher. it serves as further evidence that serpent-handlers do not use these materials to establish strict chronologies, but rather to preserve momentos of the nature and spirit of both significant and seemingly insignificant events in their spiritual past. Also, saints probably do not spend time concerning themselves with scholarly documentation practices as they rely on individual and group recollections to fill in the appropriate details when required to do so. This is one of the most important bases of the organizational styles of serpent-handlers as opposed to that of the historian. If asked about a particular undated article, the saint will probably be able to locate it generally with respect to a particular time and place, as well as provide commentary on the event's features that are of interest from a spiritual rather than a carnal point of view.

By way of illustration of the contents of scrapbooks, Brother Jimmy Williams' photo album-scrapbook contained the following items: (scrapbook lent courtesy of Jimmy Williams, December, 1972):

Newspaper clippings and articles containing the following headlines:

1. "Bitten Handler of Snake 'Fine'" (Big Stone Gap, Va.)
2. "Rattler's Bite At Religious Service Fatal" (Covington, Ky., February 20).
3. "Church Snake Bite Fatal to Man 66" (Jellico, Tenn., Jan. 20).
4. "Minister Bitten by Snake, Dies" (Pineville, Ky., Nov. 5).
5. "Minister Dies of Snakebite in Church Rite" (Big Stone, Gap)
6. "'Dead' Snake Kills Man" (Camden, S.C.) [Carnal Lore]
7. "4-Year Old Child Bitten by Snake" (Del Rio, Tenn.) [carnal Lore].
8. "Snake-Handling Scene" (Picture of Tent & Coy Barnes in Sevierville)
9. No title--woman died of snake-bite (Charleston, W.Va.)
10. "Snake Handlers Charged With Disturbance at Del Rio Church"

11. "Two Snakehandlers Bitten, One Critical" (Sevierville, Tekn.)
12. Picture with caption and untitles article (Greenville, July 9)
13. "Faith Demonstration--Snakes Patted, Petted At Revival Meeting"
14. Photo, caption--"Pulpit and Snakepit"
15. "Snakehandlers Are Irked" (Newport, Jan. 2)
16. "Snake-Handler Loses Grip But Serpent Doesn't (Newport)
17. "Snakehandler Found Guilty In Circuit Court"
18. "It's In The Book" (Kingsport Times-News, Sunday, Aug. 15, 1971)
19. "Strong Faith Emphasized In Newport Holiness Church" (Newport Plain-Talk, Sept. 29, 1970)
20. "Man Get Jail Term In Snake Case" (Wise, Va., Oct. 24)
21. "Snake Handling Results In Guilty Judgement"
22. "Snake-Bitten Man Loses Job In Morristown:
23. "Bitten Snakehandler 'Couldn't Be Healthier'"
24. No Title (Article from The Greenville News, S.C., March 12, 1972)
25. A Photo with caption
26. A want ad for "Poisonous Snakes"
27. A cartoon sketch entitled "Intellectual Gap Missing" (depicts a serpent-handler's view of Garden of Eden account.

In most of the above items, the date and source were not provided by Jimmy Williams. The only available information of this sort is that which incidentally appears on the articles themselves. Also, in some of the articles that have been mailed to saints or provided by visitors, album owners are often not certain of time, place, or circumstances. Although, at the time I did not note the exact arrangement of items in Brother Williams' scrapbook, it is clear that a strict chronological principle is not operative.

Brother Jimmy's album also included a number of 8" by 10" photographs that were provided by various freelance photographers and news reporters. There were at least ten to fifteen of these in the album, including at least two or three photos from a Chester, South Carolina serpent-handling church in the late 1940's. Jimmy Williams was featured in many of the photographs and newspaper articles.

Finally, saints sometimes have framed photographs of themselves handling serpents, hanging on the walls of their living rooms. Similarly, "preacher's credentials" indicating when the preacher was "ordained" are framed and hung on living walls in a saint's home. Both of these items serve to document and preserve significant events in a saint's religious life.

In conclusion, scrapbooks are one of the most common documentary sources in a serpent-handling community. These books provide a wealth of historical information on particular churches, plus provide some insight into how saints organize and utilize these documentary materials (strict chronology not followed). The fact that many saints keep scrapbooks is significant, as these books can be seen as ongoing chronicles of individual and group religious biographies. As such, they afford tangible evidence of the unique shared focus that provides a special identity to serpent-handling saints.

3. Tape Recordings

Jimmy Williams, as well as other saints, occasionally tape recorded church services and the church's weekly radio broadcast. At some services, as many as two or three saints have had cassette tape recorders. Brother Ralph Eslinger, for example, taped almost every service during the winter, spring, and summer of 1973, including the April 7, 1973 service during which Jimmy Williams and Buford Pack consumed lethal doses of strychnine. Brother Ralph stores his tapes in metal fishing tackle boxes. The tapes are not labelled or ordered in any way. I spent considerable time listening to Talph's tapes and provided him with a list of contents, dates, and places, where possible. Although I had Ralph's permission to do this, it did not seem to matter to him whether or not they were organized. My ordering was primarily of use to me rather than to Brother Ralph and the church.

Saints in the community sometimes borrow tapes from Ralph when they want to hear a particular sermon or spiritual song. Preachers sometimes use these tapes to monitor their own preaching and to help "get in the spirit" for impending sermons.

In recent time, however, the tapes have taken on an added significance. After the deaths of the two church brothers in 1973, many saints of the church listened to the tapes of that particular service to settle a hotly debated question--namely, did Buford state during the service prior to his death that a funeral would take place at the church within four days?[6] Tapes are now often used to settle such disputes when controversy develops over the content or wording of particular sermons.

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[6] Inthis case, the tapes did not solve the issue as that part of the service either was erased by Ralph's children or was not recorded because Ralph was changing tapes or because he was unaware that the tape had run out.

Of minor importance regarding tape recordings are cases where saints volunteer to "make a tape" for educational purposes. In the fall of 1972, for example, I asked Brother Ralph if I could tape an interview with him. He said that he would prefer if I let him use the tape recorder so that he could "make a tape" in private. Ralph's documentary tape was not chronologically ordered, did not provide exact dates, and on the whole, was a free ranging spiritual monologue aimed at my university students to help them better understand the religion. Similarly, three teenage church brothers quite willingly produced a tape for me in the fall of 1972. I provided the initial suggestion, but it was largely organized and presented by them. This tape also confirmed to the principles of ordering and style that have been discussed to this point.

4. Hand-Written Records

Considerable emphasis is given in the literature on serpent-handling concerning the fact that saints do not keep written records. Gerrard (19662:11): "Because of a family background of illiteracy, there are few documents or records, and even the family Bible is apt to have no hand-written chronology." Or, Tripp (1975:20), states that: "History of serpent-handling is scant since the churches have generally eschewed written records . . .".

While in general I would agree with the above conclusions, some written records are kept, at The Holiness Church of God in Jesus Name. Saints sometimes record important events in their lives or in the life of the church on the pages provided in family Bibles or on separate sheets of paper. For example, in a section of the Bible designated, "Events To Remember In the Life Of Our Family," Rev. Jimmy Williams included two items of interest: (1) a brief description of the details of the founding of the church; and, (2) a statement of how he wanted his funeral to be conducted. The important point to be made concerning this documentation is that in the case of the church's formation, an exact date was not provided ("the early Spring of 1969) and only the basic facts appeared. For Rev. Williams and other saints of the church, however, there was no need to record a specific date, as members would already have access to that knowledge through oral tradition, making precise historical reckoning unnecessary.[7]

Also, saints sometimes write a synopsis of dreams and prophecies so as to preserve an accurate record in case future events should validate their significance. Brother Alfred, for example, kept notes on his dreams concerning conflict in the church. He did not divulge the contents of these records, not even to his wife. He showed them to me, however, trusting that I would respect his wishes and not report on these dreams, as they were potentially socially disruptive to the church.

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[7] This mode of recording events can be contrasted to the way that Williams' military record is recorded in the Bible. On his military record, the exact dates of entering and discharge from service were recorded. Military service could be conceived of as an event bounded in time as opposed to an ongoing process such as the creation of a community of saints. In dealing with a military record, one could not rely on the background knowledge of a community to make sense of that which

5. Saints' Printing Practices

One final type of documentary practice is the printing of "minute books," religious notices and signs, preacher's calling cards, newspaper advertisements, and want ads. Taken as a whole, these types of materials serve as but another means of promoting and making public the religion.

"Minute Books" are small pamphlets of eight to ten pages that list the church's basic beliefs and cite their Biblical justifications. These are distributed to saints as well as to sinners, and are mailed to people who write, requesting information on the church.

Religious notices and signs are usually printed tracts that are used to advertise revivals, special singing services, or the establishment of a new congregation. These, along with newspaper advertisements, are utilized several times a year by the church or by particular preachers.

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was not specifically written. Willaims' family Bible also contained a written record of his marriage and the birth dates of their three children. Exact dates were recorded for these significant events. Other explanations are possible here. This is more suggestive than conclusive.

Most preachers distribute calling cards. These cards often contain a Biblical verse or a sketch of an open Bible, plus the preacher's name, phone number, and church affiliation. Calling cards help to maintain the image of the preacher as a person of importance. The cards also serve as a very practical function. Cards are given to sinners. In the event of spiritual need, the sinner will be able to locate the preacher relatively easily. Such contacts often serve as a means of recruiting new members into the church.

6. Documentary Practices - A Conclusion

In the aggregate, the practices described in the preceeding pages contribute to the fostering of an image of the church as being important. Through various documentary practices, of which making news is the most important, the community establishes links with people outside the group which provide important resources for further development of the community of serpent-handlers. Through these various practices, saints construct religious biographies, as well as bring about the fulfillment of one prophecied condition necessary for the second coming of Christ (i.e., that the gospel must first be published).

THE ORIGIN AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE HOLINESS CHURCH OF GOD IN JESUS NAME

In looking at the origin and development of The Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name three major questions will be discussed: one, who formed the church and under what circumstances was it founded; two, what types of events occurred in the church's development; and, three, how did (do) members report on these events? Saints' folk accounts of the church's past will be integrated into the overall discussion rather than be presented in a separate section. At this level of micro analysis the researcher must rely on oral accounts, personal observations, and the artifacts of saints' documentary practices (broadly defined), making it impractical to analytically separate the modes of reconstructing the past.

The Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name was established in the Spring of 1969. As recorded by Rev. Jimmy Williams in the family Bible:

> 1. Rev. Jimmy R. Williams
>   Alfred Ball
>   Liston Pack
>   Walter Newcombe
>   Established Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name at Newport Tennessee in the early spring of 1969 near Carson Springs Community on old Sevierville Road.

The simplicity and brevity of Brother Jimmy's account of the church's founding masks the complexity of the event (at least for non-members). For members, the fact that an exact founding date, precise geographical location, and more specific details are lacking is not problematic. Namely, accounts such as this are premised on members' shared background knowledge and on their ability to fill in the gaps, vis-a-vis various notions of the spiritual significance of the church's establishment. This relates to Goodridge's (1962:18) discussion of Piers The Ploughman in which "truth" is constructed as . . . "something to be appropriated to oneself, not merely understood by the mind." Brother Ralph Eslinger's testimony on the formation of the church illustrates this spiritual appropriation of the church's history (tape recorded December 13, 1972):

> I Ralph Eslinger, being a minister of the gospel, and I, I come out of the Methodist into the Baptist, Baptist into the Holiness. And all in my church I walk, I know that a greater desire couldn't find out what it was and this Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name come out. I started a goin' to this church and I knowd that I, that's what I'd been looking for. I knowd that that was true and it was the pure Word of God . . I've had a few questions asked me about where the people come from that made up the Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name. There're come from all walks of life, some of em' been Baptist, Presbyterian, Holiness and they, they want to stick to the old pathway, the old traditions of God. And they came out of different churches and assemble themselves together and set up the church which is called the Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name. There, God is the head of the church. There, we foller his guidance and we don't use any literature at all, we use the holy Bible, King James version Bible. . .

Given Brother Ralph's view, the establishment of the church is not seen as an isolated, discrete event in the past, but rather as a culmination of saints' searchings for a more pure form of worship and "Christian" community.

Prior to the emergence of the Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name, Jimmy Williams, Alfred Ball, Liston Pack, and Walter Newcombe[8] along with a number of other brothers and sisters, had been participants at the Sand Hill Church of God In Jesus Name, which was located in an isolated rural valley near Del Rio, Tennessee in Cocke County. Serpent-handling had been practiced at the Sand Hill Church in the late 1940's and early 1950's, but because of legal difficulties over incidents of serpent-bite, etc., which led to factionalism in the church, the practice was discontinued there sometime in the 1950's.[9] Regarding this incident, Brother Alfred Ball recalled in a tape-recorded interview with me (December 1974):

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[8] Williams, Ball, and Pack were ardent converts to serpent-handling in their mid-twenties, while Newcombe was a retired professional soldier in his late fifties who, after years of travel, returned to his native home in the East Tennessee Mountains. Pack and Ball were reformed petty lawbreakers and Jimmy Williams was an ex-Navy man from South Carolina who had participated in the Cuban Missile blockade.

[9] Specifically, a young boy, Johnny Raines, suffered permanent injury to his hand from a snake-bite received during a service at Sand Hill. Raines, who allegedly had handled serpents prior to this incident, was handed the snake by an adult church member. A court case resulted and the member responsible for giving Raines the snake was sentenced to a six month jail term in the Knoxville workhouse. According to reports, the judge enjoined the others at the church to discontinue snake-handling (from conversation with Jimmy Williams, December 15, 1972). There is some confusion on this point, however, as some of the older Sand Hill participants who currently worship at the Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name deny that they no longer "take up serpents" because of the judge's admonition.

RJB: Did the Sand Hill Church believe in taking up serpents and working in the other signs?

Alfred: Un, well, apparently they claimed they did, 'Course they give us some trouble at a later date over it, but they did teach it to us. Some of the people believed in it. . .

RJB: What would cause, what caused the Sand Hill Church to quit taking up serpents and to quit believing in that part of the Bible. . .

Alfred: Well, I, I think, some of the people there to this very day still believe in it, but I think what actually brought about their stoppin' takin' up serpents was they had a man there, somethin' like 22, or 3 years ago now, it would have been that long, that got out of the will of God and out of knowledge, out of just plain common knowledge and he placed a rattlesnake up on a boy who had been takin' up serpents, now this wasn't somebody that never had done it. It was a boy that had been takin' up serpents, and had evidently backslid at the time or, anyway, he had been takin' up serpents and this preacher put one, hung one around his neck and it bit him and he almost died this boy.

RJB: It bit him on the face?

Alfred: On the hand, and he, he lost, lost his hand, or the use of it after that and he almost died because of this man not using wisdom.

RJB: And what happened about 20 years ago?

Alfred: Something like 23 year ago now or 24, meybe even 24, now, I guess. Probably closer to 25 years ago at this date when that happened and it, that really caused them a lot of trouble and they kind of got away from it and a lot of the people just left the faith after that, and, of course, some of them still held onto it. . .

Although serpent-handling was discontinued at Sand Hill, the practice continued to take place in Cocke and Sevier Counties on an irregular basis when travelling Evangelists from Virginia, South Carolina, other parts of Tennessee, etc., held tent revivals in the area during the 1950's and 1960's. These tent revivals evidently attracted people from a fairly wide area. A revival held in Sevierville, Tennessee sometime around 1965 is illustrative. Two serpent-handlers were bitten at this revival and it therefore received press coverage. One of the bitten men was reported to be 27 year old Coy Barnes, a Sevierville brick mason. Roscoe Mullins of Big Stone Gap, Virginia was the other snakebite victim. Mullins and a Rev. Pepper from Virginia were said to have furnished the snakes forthe Sevierville revival. Supposedly, Barnes had been practicing snake-handling in the Sevierville area for some six months at the time of the snakebit incident. It is interesting to note that: ". . . the sheriff said he was told several persons from Virginia, and North Carolina, and some from Newport, were at the Sunday night meeting" (Knoxville News-Sentinel, Edward V. Hall, reporter; from Scrapbook collection of Jimmy Williams, not dated, approximate date provided by Jimmy Williams in conversation of December 15, 1972).

Williams, Ball, and Pack, as well as other brothers and sisters who later became "charter" members of the Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name, attended tent revivals, similar to the one cited above, in which serpent-handling took place. Also, during the late 1960's, Williams and Ball attended services at the Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name at Big Stone Gap, Virginia, where serpent-handling was practiced.

In August of 1967, Oscar Pelfrey of the Big Stone Gap church died of a rattlesnake bite. This convinced Williams that the serpent's fangs had not been pulled and that the religion's claims were authentic, as Pelfrey had successfully had "victory" over poisonous snakes on many previous occasions.

Concerning the saints' involvement in the Sand Hill Church and the formation of the Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name, Brother Alfred Ball related the following to me in a taped interview (December 1974):[10]

> Alfred: Yes, 1969 in the spring is when this particular church began. And, the people that organized this church learned about this faith from another local church who had in turn learned it some twenty, thirty, some, between twenty and thirty years ago from a church in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, which was in operation, I understand, for something like, oh, thirty some years. So, it will probably go back thirty-five or forty years locally, with local people in it, in the snake, a serpent-handling.
>
> RJB: Was that the church at Sand Gap?
>
> Alfred: Sand Hill
>
> RJB: Sand Hill?
>
> Alfred: Yes, they, they at Sand Hill, the people of Sand Hill learned about the faith from people that come out of the church in Big Stone Gap, Virginia. The Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name. . . The Church in Big Stone Gap has been there for something like 32 or 3 year.
>
> RJB: Did the people who started The Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name, they all went to Sand, Sand Hill before they started the church?

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[10] The question could be raised what impact my questions to Alfred had on the structure and content of his recollections? I would say very little as the taped interview was a conscious performance for both Alfred and myself for the benefit of the Video Ethnography Series monography I was working on.

Alfred: Yes, yes, Jimmy Williams and, a myself, and a Liston Pack had all attended Sand Hill church and Jimmy and myself were instrumental in beginning the church, and of course, of course, Liston was, Liston was involved too when we started the church. Actually, the idea originated with Jimmy Williams and myself and, of course we were acquainted with Pack at the time and he was with us too, so when it come right down to the organization and, and the startin' of the church and the work on the church building he was as much involved as anybody. He had been goin' to Sand Hill and just recently repented a short time, and, as a matter of fact was not even a minister at the time the church began, having only repented some, couple of three months before. And Jimmy had been a minister for, oh, Jimmy had been a minister for, since '67, the church started in '69, Jimmy had been a minister for about 2 years. I'd been a minister somethin' like 5 years at the time, havin' been ordained in 1966, after havin' been preachin' for about a year.

RJB: Were you ordained at the Sand Hill Church?

Alfred: No, I was ordained with the Church of the Apostolic Faith in Knoxville, Tennessee, which this church incidently didn't take up serpents.

RJB: Oh, the one in Knoxville?

Alfred: No, it didn't, the one in Knoxville didn't and as a matter of fact when I begin preachin' and was ordained, I didn't even know about takin' up serpents. I learned that myself personally. I learned about this faith in, first heard of takin' up serpents in oh, '67, '68, somewhere along there in, about sixty, about sixty-seven I guess when Jimmy repented and come into it we began to work into the signs of takin' up serpents. Of course, there was five signs, we'd, we begin to move into all that, around 1967.

To this point in Brother Alfred's historical recollections, it

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Specifically, I already knew the answers to the questions that I asked Alfred and he was aware that I knew. In any case, the formal interview parallels any number of informal, unsolicited accounts of the church's origins given by Alfred and other saints. These accounts can be seen as the presentation of commonly known facts.

is noteworthy that he also does not give an exact date for the founding of The Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name but states: ". . . 1969 in the spring is when this particular church began." Similarly, throughout the account when events are recalled, dates are approximated rather than precisely established. Brother Alfred's account emphasizes the people involved in the forming of the church and the origins of serpent-handling in that partof East Tennessee. With regard to the saints who were instrumental in founding the church, Alfred's frame of reference appears to be their state of spiritual development or status as "Christians," i.e., whether or not they were ordained, had "worked in the signs," and when they had "repented."

The actual events that led the young saints (mid-20's) to leave the Sand Hill Church of God are complex and difficult to assess because of lack of evidence. It appears that the precipitating factor was the saints' attempts to reintroduce serpent-handling at the Sand Hill Church. As Williams, Ball, and Pack had been taught by Pond Hill saints that "taking up serpents" was Biblically correct and had participated in tent revivals with serpent-handling saints from Big Stone Gap, Virginia, they attempted to revitalize the church by reintroducing serpent-handling there.[11] As reported by Alfred Ball (tape December 1974):

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[11] It is quite common for young, ardent believers to attempt to re-instate serpent-handling in congregations where the practice has lapsed. Since the death of Oscar Pelfrey in

> Alfred: . . . later after Jimmy and myself got there [Sand Hill] and they taught this to us [serpent-handling], though they were not doin' it. We begin to practice it and some of those people begin to practice it again, at that, at that point and those same people, the ones of them that are still livin', are still practicin' it now since they started back at the time Jimmy and myself begin to do it in Sand Hill. Course, they still don't have serpents in Sand Hill Church today, they still don't have them.

The saints were thwarted in their efforts to reinstate serpent-handling atSand Hill and encountered legal difficulties because of their attempts. Namely, some of the older Sand Hill members called the sheriff and had the brothers arrested for violating the Tennessee anti-snake handling law. The saints also ran afoul of the law by conducting impromptu serpent-handling demonstrations at service station lots and on street corners in Newport. In addition, the saints attempted to practice serpent-handling at the First Baptist Church in Newport and at other established churches.[12]

Because of their serpent-handling at Sand Hill and in public places around Newport, the saints were summoned to

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1967, the Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name at Big Stone Gap, Virginia has discontinued serpent-handling. As related by Brother Paul Stidham (December, 1974) of that church, a number of the young saints are attempting to revitalize the church by reintroducing serpent-handling.

[12] The young "apostles", during this period, appeared in public demonstrations of faith wearing black vests with various Biblical injunctions painted on them. One vest, worn by Jimmy Williams proclaimed in white letters: "Mark 16:18, Jesus said, 'They Shall take up serpents'" (from photos in Scrapbook collections of Jimmy Williams and of Floyd McCall). The vest-wearing brothers also participated in serpent-handling services in South Carolina during the late 1960's. An undated newspaper photo from Jimmy Williams' scrapbook, shows Jimmy

appear before Judge George Shepherd sometime in late 1968 or early 1969. As recounted by Brother Alfred (December 1974, from tape interview):

> . . . but just some year before that, or two years before that [1970] there had been some trouble and they [Sand Hill Church] called the law and we were in court and the judge told us that if we're goin' to practice that [serpent-handling], looked like that we would get our own place, practice what we believe, not be forcin' it on other people, so, we did do that. . .

It is out ofthis background that the Holiness Church of God in Jesus Name was formed in the Spring of 1969. Initially, Williams, Ball, and Pack attempted to rent a building in Newport for their church services, but were refused when people learned that they were serpent-handlers. Finally, a small hunting cabin adjacent to Jones Branch at the head of a cove off English Mountain was rented (and later purchased) and the first meetings of the Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name were Held. Meetings continue to be held in this setting today.

Of the days immediately prior to the acquisition of the church-house Williams recalled in a newspaper interview (Kingsport-Times, August 15, 1971, Scrapbook Collection of Jimmy Williams) that:

Williams, Buford Pack, Liston Pack, and others handling serpents. This photo can be dated to the period just prior to the founding of The Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name as Williams is wearing the black vest with printing on it. These vests evidently were not used after the formation of the church and were probably an artifact from days past of street demonstrations and active evangelizing activity at other established congregations.

> Before the Lord made the way clear for us to buy this place, it seemed everywhere we tried to have services the landlord would lock us out. Course He never said it would be easy. Jesus said people would hate us for doing His will. But I'd rather be right with Him than the world. We've been persecuted, put in jail and humiliated. But I'd rather have Jesus on my side than a .38 anyday. . .

At first, only a few families participated in the small church. Jimmy Williams served as the first pastor of the new church. As he had obtained his preacher's credentials and spiritual guidance from The Holiness Church of God in Jesus Name at Big Stone Gap, Virginia, the new church assumed that name. Sometime in late 1969 or early 1970, the small group purchased the cabin and two acres of adjacent land. Members reasoned that if the group owned the land and the building, the law or private interests could not interfere with their controversial religious practices, a supposition that has not been borne out. On May 30, 1970, an official boundary survey of the church's land was carried out by R. F. Haynes & Son Land Surveyor of Cosby, Tennessee. This serves as an important historical document as the former hunting cabin was not listed as a "church" on the survey's official blueprint (from Boundary Survey, 1970, from collection of Jimmy Williams, December 1972). The formation of the new church was also evidenced by the following want ad published in a Newport newspaper in 1969 or 1970: "Wanted--Poison serpents for Church services. Rattlers and Copperheads will do. Contact Jimmy R. Williams, Holiness Church of God In Jesus

Name. M.31, p.11 (undated item from scrapbook collection of Jimmy Williams, December 1972).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HOLINESS CHURCH OF GOD IN JESUS NAME 1970 TO THE PRESENT

By September 29, 1970, the newly formed church began "making news." At that time Larry Aldridge, a reporter for the local Newport Plain Talk newspaper, wrote a sympathetic article on the church, which included six photographs. The article provides considerable information on the young church, including that (Plain Talk, September 29, 1970, from Scrapbook collection of Jimmy Williams, December 1972): "The church has an enrollment of 50, but as many as 150 to 200 have attended, says Williams," In addition, the article states that:

> Obviously there is a great deal of danger involved in handling a rattlesnake or a copperhead, and Rev. Williams agrees. 'Four people were bit this summer,' he said, 'but none went to the doctor, and are all still in good health. We don't have anything against doctors, it's just a matter of who you are putting your trust in.'

Although four people were bitten during the summer of 1970, saints today remember this early period as a "spirit filled time," a time when "the spirit ran so strong" that it was necessary to stand in line to get an opportunity to handle serpents (field notes, August 20, 1972). As recalled by Rev. Liston Pack on August 20, (tape transcription) during a special singing service:

> . . . I saw 20 people out here a handling serpents. Amen, approximately 20 to 30 people are handling serpents, amen. I saw a time, amen, you, you, just had to hurry if you got a hold of one. I saw a time you'd just have to stand in line, amen. I stood right here, Brother Painter, and reached for one and the brother beside me wanted to keep it awhile longer, lay it on top of his head awhile, put it around his neck awhile, and come back and I'll say I'm gonna get it now and I'll go to get it . . . and then someone else would get it. . .

The early, "spirit filled" days of the church are often recalled in testimonies similar to Liston's. The point of such testimonies is usually to cajole saints into "living right" so that the spirit of a newly formed church can be kindled anew. It is interesting to note that in recalling the past Brother Liston did not refer to a particular date or specify a time period; rather, he located the past time by saying, "I saw a time." While Liston's style of time reckoning may lack the precision required by the historian, for members it locates a significant period in the religious biography of the church.

Late in 1970 and early in 1971, members of the church faced legal difficulties and were involved in two or three court hearings, resulting from an earlier incident at the Sand Hill Church of God. Namely, a number of Newport members brought and handled serpents at a revival being conducted at Sand Hill. The members were found guilty, "judgement reserved" (Cocke County Circuit Court Document) on the provision that no further trouble of this kind would occur at the Sand Hill Church. As related by Brother Alfred Ball in a taped interview with me, regarding the Sand Hill incident (December 1974):

> Alfred: Matter of fact last time they [serpents] were there [Sand Hill] we took 'em and, they called the law.
>
> RJB: Was that after the Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name was formed, or?
>
> Alfred: No, that was before, the last time we took 'em up there was, some, I guess, some year maybe or maybe in the summer before we organized the church in Carson Springs and we were invited there by a minister, no, no we had the church organized here and this minister was in revival up there. He wrote us and invited us to come and we took serpents then and they called the law on us that time, but just some year before that, or two years before that there had been some trouble and they called the law and we were in court and the judge told us that if we were goin' to practice that, looked like that we would get our own place, practice what we believe, not be forcin' it on other people, so, we did do that and hadn't even been back to Sand Hill until this preacher invited us and we went, taking serpents at his invitation and, again, the people that were in authority of the church, this was just an evangelist in there, called the law and, again, there was trouble over it and they, they lawed us again, so, we hadn't been back since that time. And only went that time because we were invited.

On June 16, 1971, Buford Pack was bitten by a copperhead during a Wednesday night church service. Knoxville News-Sentinel reporter, Jim Dykes, and staff photographer, Terry Moore, were present at the invitation of church member, Clyde Ray Ricker. As a result, the church received widespread regional publicity. United Press International and Associated Press published the story and the news of Burford's injury was quickly circulated throughout North America. This incident and the resulting publicity aroused some anti snake-handling sentiment among Cocke Countians. Brother Buford Pack recovered from the copperhead bite, but lost his job at a plant in Morristown because he was absent from work without a doctor's statement.

During the remainder of the summer of 1971, no other incidents of serpent-bite were reported and the church did not encounter legal difficulties. Late in the summer, annual elections were held for pastor. Since the church's founding in 1969, Jimmy Williams had served in that capacity. However, Liston Pack was elected and is presently serving as the pastor of the church. Recently (1973) Brother Pack abolished yearly elections as he maintained that they tended to create confusion and dissension within the church.

In the Fall of 1971 Jimmy Williams was arrested in Virginia for handling serpents at the funeral of Frank Necessary, an esteemed evangelist from Jonesboro, Georgia. Necessary had requested prior to his death from diabetes that serpents be handled at his funeral. This is a common request for snake-handlers to make, a request that saints feel honor-bound, regardless of the legal consequences. Also, during this period, Jimmy Williams received his first serpent-bite since he was converted to the faith some five years before.[13]

Upon returning to the Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name during the summer of 1972, Brother Liston Pack, the church's new pastor, informed me that some things had changed at the church since my last visit. Serpents were not taken up as frequently as in 1971 when I was last present. Also, greater emphasis seemed to be given to "casting out demons" and healing the sick. Early in the summer, however, exorcisms were brought almost totally to a halt because of an incident involving a young, mentally retarded girl. The exorcists were unable to "cast the demon out" and the girl responded by screaming, crawling on her hands and knees, and fighting off anyone who approached her. This event created considerable dissension in the church and contributed to an intensification of already existing factionalism.

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[13] This is of interest because up until that time, Williams had maintainedthat if a person was serpent-bit and sufrered, that he or she was not "right with God" (field notes July 1971). Because of Williams' painful encounter with the serpent, he felt that he had developed a "deeper insight" into the knowledge of the ways of the faith (field notes November 1972).

Also during this summer, Buford Pack was bitten by a rattlesnake at a Brevard, North Carolina tent revival, but he allegedly did not suffer or "even swell up." He was considered by some in the church to have had an excellent "anointing." Buford and Jimmy Williams also began "drinking deadly poisons." Buford reportedly consumed battery acid that had been furnished by a "sinner man" and Jimmy drank a mixture of water and carbontetrachloride. Brother Williams expressed often that he wanted to consume strychnine, but it was not locally available without a doctor's prescription.

By the end of the summer of 1972, serpent-handling seemed to be on the increase. In October, its occurrence reached a duration andintensity reminiscent of the church's early days. However in November 1972, a young brother, Billy

Jay Forrester, was bitten by a rattlesnake and became quite ill.[14] Forrester eventually recovered from the injury, but lost his job in a local factory because of the unexcused absence from work. After this, serpent-handling appeared to wane until the period between January through April of 1973. During the fall of 1972, the Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name regularized its monthly visitations with serpent-handling churches at Middlesboro, Kentucky; Greenville, South Carolina; and, attempted to establish such ties with former serpent-handlers near LaFollette, Tennessee.

Between January and April of 1973, Brother Liston wrote to me saying that the services were becoming increasingly "spirit filled." Three serpent-handling brothers from Chattanooga began visiting the church. One of them had formerly been involved with the Dolley Pond Church of God with Signs Following, and the other two were purportedly of Cherokee descent. Also, a number of other out of state visitors became fairly regular attendants at the Newport church. However, an extremely ecstatic, "spirit filled" service on April 7, 1973, culminated with the deaths of Jimmy Williams and Buford Pack. Both men consumed lethal doses of strychnine during the church service and died not long after.

As a result of the deaths, the county served a warrant on the church charging Liston Pack and Alfred Ball with involuntary manslaughter. It was also recommended that the church be indefinitely padlocked as a "public nuisance." Also, owing to the deaths, the church was beset by news reporters and curiosity seekers.

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[14] Incidently, a film crew from East Tennessee State University was present and this incident, as well as Jimmy Williams consuming carbontetrachloride, was filmed and made into an award winning documentary, "They Shall Take Up Serpents."

During the subsequent hearing in the Cocke County Circuit Court, the men were acquitted of the involuntary manslaughter charge and the padlock order withdrawn on the condition that serpent-handling be immediately discontinued. The practice continued however, and during the annual homecoming service in early July 1973, a number of Western Diamondback rattlesnakes were handled and nine saints handled an Indian Cobra. Near the end of the afternoon, Burlin Bass (a visiting saint from Chattanooga) was bitten by a Western Diamondback and within a couple of days underwent emergency surgery in a Chattanooga hosptial. A number of reporters were present at this service, as well as agents from the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation.

On Saturday, July 28, 1973, the leaders of the church again appeared before the Cocke County Circuit Court on contempt of court charges. Liston Pakc and Alfred Ball (the assistant pastor) were found guilty and fined $25 for each time the special agents observed them handling serpents. Both men were also sentenced to 30 days in jail. Only two days of this sentence were served by them. Subsequent to the July 28 court hearing, the American Civil Liberties Union volunteered to defend the church in order to challenge the constitutionality of the Tennessee anti snake-handling statute.

By the end of the summer of 1973, the church was rife with tension and conflict. The pastor began appearing on local and regional radio and television programs. Many saints did not like the pastor's attitude during this period expressing the sentiment that he had "gotten the big head" and was neglecting this pastoral duties and not acting "in the Spirit of the Lord," but in the spirit of "self."[15] By December 1973, however, Liston curtailed his appearances and humbly recommitted himself to the responsibilities of being pastor.

According to Liston Pack, in a letter to me in June 1974, serpent-handling was continuing to be practiced in the church, despite the law and despite the fact that a number of members wanted to discontinue it:

> The church is going right along. We still take up serpents, the law is leaving us alone now, or at least for right now. We have not had any more trouble with them they saw that I wasn't going to quit even tho (sic) some of the church people wants to. They haven't told me but I can discern the spirit.

Since the deaths in 1973, a number of people left the church to form a new group--The House of Prayer In Jesus Name--near Morristown, Tennessee. Brother Robert Grooms is the pastor and serpent-handling appears to be practiced only when initiated by visitors from other congregations who happen to bring serpents with them. Also, following the deaths and the events of the summer and fall of 1973, a number of other formerly regular church goers left the church.

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[15] Liston, on the other hand, reacted by suggesting that his critics were jealous of his popularity and that by his media efforts he could further promulgate the "word of God" to the large audience in "radio and T.V. land." At one point, for example, Liston was considering travelling to California, where

During the winter and spring of 1974, the rift between Liston and his assistant, Alfred Ball, intensified and Ball was removed from his position of assistant pastor by Pack. Ball responded by becoming an evangelist and travelling to serpent-handling congregations in other localities.

In October, 1974 the Tennessee Supreme Court ruled that ". . . banning snake-handling in church worship services would be an infringement on constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion" (in the Dallas Morning News, October 24, 1974). In addition, the court ordered that a new circuit court hearing be conducted to ". . . set up court-approved safety restrictions on snake-handling" (ibid). Consequently, many members were unhappy with the results and expressed the feeling that they had really gained little after the guidelines of the circuit court had been drawn up.

In November, 1974, The House of Prayer In Jesus Name, Marshall North Carolina (established by former participants of The Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name) held its initial service. Snake-handlers attended from Georgia, South Carolina, Kentucky, North Carolina, and from Chattanooga, Tennessee. The service ended in controversy and old rifts between saints were widened. Liston appeared to be increasingly under the

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he allegedly was offered $150.00 per day to appear on a number of television shows.

influence of brothers from Chattanooga (Barbee and Bass), who practice serpent and fire handling in a manner considered careless by Ball and a number of other saints. Namely, serpents are carried back into the congregation, "let loose" on the floor or on the pulpit, etc. During this service, Ball and about ten other saints walked out of the service angered over the way the service was being conducted. For days after this service, Brother Alfred and his associates talked about the improper procedures of Liston and Barbee. A number of saints suggested to Alfred that he should form his own congregation.

In late November and early December of 1974, Brother Alfred searched for a building that could serve as a church-house. On December 1, 1975, Brother Alfred wrote and informed me that:

> Yes, I did finally get that church I wanted. We bought one on the Cosby highway 4 miles from town. We got a 30x60 building with a full basement and nearly an acre of ground at a cost of $32,000.00 dollars. Boy we sure did stick our necks out on that one, our expenses are near $500.00 a month. But, praise the Lord, we have met every payment on time so far. We had our first service on July 10th. I am enclosing a card and a pamplet (sic) from the church.

The announcement that Brother Alfred sent reads as follows:

JESUS CHRIST APOSTOLIC CHURCH, Located 4 miles south of New port on Cosby highway behind James Bryant Grocery (Highway 32) 'A New Church With the Old Gospel.'

Services Thur., Sat. and Sundays nights at 7:30
Also Hear: 'Jesus Is Just a Prayer Away'
Sundays At 2:30 on WLIK Radio

If You're Sick, Need Healing, You can Find It Here
Need Deliverance? It's Here Now!

This is A Church Where The Commission Jesus Gave His Followers Is in Operation NOW!

If You are looking for a church where the real gospel is preached without fear or partiality then this is The Church You are looking for!

Pastor: Rev. Alfred Ball

The formation of the three new congregations by former participants at the Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name has had considerable impact on that body. Prior to the new churches, saints from a relatively wide area had little choice but to attend the Carson Springs church if they wanted to worship in a serpent-handling congregation. Some saints had come from North Carolina (20 to 50 miles) while others drove from Morristown (15 to 30 miles). With the formation of the three new groups, saints now have the option of worshipping relatively close to their residences. Also, as the new church s are premised on specific emphases of faith and practice, saints have the choice of attending the church that most closely conforms to their personal predilections. Consequently, the composition of members has changed considerably at the Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name.

At this writing, the Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name continues to exist and has attracted a number of new converts.[16] Also, to my knowledge, the church continues to be influenced by the "brothers from Chattanooga." As well, the new churches in Morristown, Marshall (North Carolina), and Newport continue to provide alternatives of worship for saints.

CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

As in Chapter II, history has been approached in this chapter both as a chronicle of the past and as a folk resource appropriated by saints in the creation and maintenance of a distinctive identity and sense of community. History is selectively interpreted, simplified, rearranged, and modified by saints for particular purposes at hand, thereby making it ethno-history in the literal sense. Through these practices, a relatively new group has defined itself as being persecuted, separated, newsworthy, and heirs to a Holiness tradition.

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[16] On Wednesday March 10, 1976, The Edmonton Journal carried the following on the church: "The Holiness Church of God In Jesus' Name in the Tennessee mountains is described in a news dispatch as having a small congregation. A ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court this week may ensure the congregation does not get still smaller. The court refused to hear an appeal from Rev. Liston Pack, minister of the Tennessee church, against a state court decision forbidding the handling of rattlesnakes and the drinking of strychnine in his services. The Tennessee court had noted that two members of the congregation at a service two years ago died after drinking strychnine and a third person suffered a non-fatal snake bite. Pack contended the snake-handling and poison-swilling were necessary to his services and, as religious acts, were protected by the U.S. constitution."

The question of identity is, however, complex and, like the folk uses of history and documentary practices, constitutes only a portion of the total resources employed by serpent-handlers in the ongoing creation of their religion. The remainder of this dissertation will discuss these matters.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION OF A COMMUNITY OF SAINTS

As will be discussed in Chapter V, part of members' identities as saints derives from their ideology of separation from the "things of this world". Nevertheless, saints do live and earn a livelihood in secular communities and, in addition, share a heritage of social class and background with numerous sinners in the secular community. Some of the dimensions of saints' soci-economic situation will now be examined.

SERPENT-HANDLING AND SOCIETY

Many writers have described serpent-handlers sociologically, including: Schwarz (1960), La Barre (1962a), Stekert (1963), Cobb (1965, Gerrard (1966a, 1968, 1971), Birckhead (1971), Kane (1974, 1974), Tripp (1975), and Vance (1975). Popular writers, film makers, and numerous news reporters have also touched on the subject of serpent-handlers' social and economic position in society. The profile that emerges is that of lower class, rural Appalachians with little formal education and low literacy rates, who earn their livelihood as farmers, coal miners, mechanics, gas station attendants, truck drivers, factory and mill workers, loggers, small store operators, construction workers, and various wage-labor occupations. When women work outside of the home, it is usually in factory jobs, or as cooks, chambermaids and waitresses. Seasonal unemployment and general underemployment are seen as regular features of serpent-handlers' economic environment. Many young members leave school at sixteen in order to take low-paying jobs in factories or at service stations.[1]

Proceeding from this, serpent-handlers are portrayed in the literature as prematurely aged due to inadequate dental care, poor diets, hard work, mine accidents, inadequate housing, early childbirth, and large families with little or no spacing between children.

While the popular press tends to portray serpent-handlers as backwoods, quaint, bumpkins; the scientific literature, for the most part, views serpent-handling as an acculturative movement of recently rural poor who have migrated to regional mill towns, coal camps, or manufacturing centers. The relatively recent spread of serpent-handling to cities such as: Detroit and Flint, Michigan; Akron, Columbus, Cleveland, and Cincinatti, Ohio; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and suburban Atlanta; Oakridge, Tennessee; and other centers, can possibly be seen in this light. La Barre (1962a:167-169) states that:

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[1] Regarding employment opportunities for young men in the church Gerrard (1966a:12) writes:

> "Even the most conscientious are able to find only temporary work, and some risk their old cars on trips to Ohio, Michigan, Virginia--anywhere they have heard there might be work. Sometimes they are gone three or four months, but often they return much sooner, broke and discouraged."

> The workers in the great mechanized tobacco factories, and in the other growing industries in the South, are drawn from this rural proletariat. It is specifically this poor-white class to which the snake-handling cult primarily appeals. . .
>
> Fate seems to have preordained him to be a textile worker. Even when he migrates from the South, he is lost, helpless, and without resources; when he goes to Southern Michigan and Ohio industrial towns, he turns them into Southern places with his intransigent ethos. In any new situation, without adaptive resilience, he is functionally very much like the immigrant from a foreign country; and even in a Southern town he seems a rural primitive tribesman, with rigidly tribal values.

La Barre (1962a:163-169) sees serpent-handling as an unsuccessful attempt by "the new industrial proletariat" to cope with: "cultural isolation; erosion of rural egalitarianism, male dominance, "former agrarian tempo of work", and self esteem; and, the growing awareness of ". . . incidious cultural and economic advantages which they cannot have." In general it is a reaction to a hostile, "repressive, routinized, monotonous, joyless and denying" (ibid.) socio-cultural milieu. Consequently, the recently rural poor white, is "suspicious of all changes and novelty"; "not adventurous"; "nor is he progressive"; resentful; capable of personal violence; and compulsive. In snake-handling, they (ibid.):

> . . . find miracle and mastery, and a full expression of their feelings. The communicant is granted emotional salvation and rescue from the deprivation and the dourness of his economic and general cultural lot. In the cult he can find proof that God, at least, loves him. . .

La Barre (1962a: 171) concludes that: "The recently rural poor whites of the South are not handling their real social and economic problems through the snake-handling cult, nor their real problems of acculturation, nor their real intrapsyhic stresses".

With respect to serpent-handling in general, the picture La Barre paints is not totally an accurate one. Serpent-handlers' general quality of life (including, employment profile, housing, income, acculturative stress, and degree of articulation with the secular society) varies from community to community depending on regional location (North or South, Appalachian or lowland) and settlement type (rural vs. urban; manufacturing, mining, textile mills, agricultural, or mixed economy).[2] For example, Gerrard (1966a:71-72) found some discontinuities among a serpent-handling population at Scrabble Creek, West Virginia. Thus:

> Although the serpent-handlers of Scrabble Creek West Virginia and the serpent-handlers of the mill villages of the New South share a common religion, and their soci-economic status is about the same, the two groups are quite different in other respects. It may be hypothesized that involvement in the urbanization process began earlier, was less abrupt and less discontinuous, and hence less of a cultural shock in the case of the Scrabble Creek folk. . .

For one thing, the coal camp existence experienced by many of the Scrabble Creek members was qualitatively different from that of La Barre's mill workers (Ibid., pp. 72-73):

> The coal camps were one class communities and the dominant ethos was egalitarian; the management group was set apart, but it was too small to form an independent class. Status distinction among the

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[2] Pearsall (1966) isolates and distinguishes some of the regional and subregional variation in the American South.

> workers were slight, and status-oriented behavior correspondingly weak. Close physical proximity, homogeneity of experience and interests, friendliness of neighbors, easy informality, and the absence of a self-conscious etiquette form a Gemeinschaft-like society. Work in the coal mines was less depersonalizing than in the southern cotton mill described by La Barre where the worker tends his machine in isolation, seldom communicating with his fellow-workers. Although work in the mines was also monotonous, and the conditions of work were also extremely uncomfortable, much of the underground work was done by small cohesive crews. The dangerous nature of their work, and their close physical proximity, fostered close personal ties and a high degree of esprit de corps.

Gerrard does not deny the general lower class position of serpent-handlers but demonstrates that variables such as economic history and environment can produce significant differences between serpent-handling populations.

Tripp (1975:14) in describing the occupations of serpent-handlers at a church near Atlanta, Georgia, also argues for local diversity:

> Since the church is in a rural setting and the available literature indicates that most believers are farmers, one could erroneously assume that Northwest Church members would be in farm related occupations. There is not a farmer in the church, although several members come from farming families and maintain gardens for their own use. Over half (57 percent) of the men are carpenters and subcontractors. Two believers, successful building contractors, occasionally hire other Holiness men to work on construction projects. With the exception of one man who sells insurance, the other men are blue collar workers, holding such jobs as welder, auto mechanic, airplane mechanic, auto assemblyline worker, butcher, and painter. . .

Also, in contrast to the rural "cabins", coal camp houses, or shabby mill town dwellings usually described in the literature, Tripp (1975:12) found that most of the group studied in Georgia ". . . live in a subdivision located in a surburb halfway between Atlanta and the church". In terms of the often described rural Appalachian background of serpent-handlers, it is of interest that at the Georgia church one female participant is "from Cambridgeshire, England" (Ibid.) Similarly, Steven Kane related to me (personal conversation, July 1973) that in the serpent-handling group with which he worked in West Virginia, saints tended to have the more modern houses and in general were more prosperous than their non-serpent-handling working class neighbors.

My data on the Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name also disputes some of the generalizations usually made in the literature regarding level of poverty, isolation, sense of alienation, and "backwoods" nature of the group. It is my contention that not only are some of the generalizations inaccurate for particular groups, but that, by simplifying prematurely, important aspects of a serpent-handling community are lost to analysis. The question remains to be answered: who are the serpent-handlers of The Holiness Church of God In Jesys Name and how do they relate to the larger community in which the church is located?

THE HOLINESS CHURCH OF GOD IN JESUS NAME AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

The Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name is located on a dead-end private road in a wooded cove of English Mountain, in the Carson Springs Community. Carson Springs Community is a semi-rural residential area which lies adjacent to Inter-state 40 at the western approach to Newport, the county seat of Cocke County, Tennessee. The church is located about two and one-half miles southwest of the Inter-state highway and the Ramada Inn Motel. Although there are some vegetable gardens in Carson Springs, most residents work at various plants or have other jobs in Newport or the surrounding area. Homes in Carson Springs range from old mountain "shacks" (from when the area was more rural) to modern brick and frame ranch style houses.

Newport is a light manufacturing center of some 7,328 residents (U.S. Census, 1970), 6,357 of whom were born in the state of Tennessee. Newport is situated on the French Broad River and is included in the Tennessee Valley Authority development area. The town in located roughly sixty miles from Great Smokey Mountain National Park and is surrounded by scattered mountain outliers of the Smokies. Reflective of its Appalachian location, Newport and Cocke County are composed largely of a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant population. In fact, only 699 of the county's 25,283 residents are black.

This is noteworthy as outside observers often comment on the absence of blacks at serpent-handling services, attributing this imbalance to racial prejudice rathern than to population composition. Also reflective of its Southern Appalachian location, education and income levels are relatively low in Cocke and neighboring counties of East Tennessee and Western North Carolina. In 1970, for example, the median years of schooling completed by Cocke County's rural non-farm population was 8.5 years for people of 25 years and older (Ibid.).[3]

With respect to employment, most Cocke Countians earn their livelihood in some type of manufacturing. Of 8,246 individuals 16 years and older, 4,132 were employed in manufacturing, while only 593 residents are employed in agriculture, forrestry and fisheries. The remaining employed residents of the county are involved in a variety of service industry, retail, wholesale, semi-professional, and professional occupations.

In 1970, the median income for Cocke County's 6,641 families was $5,437 and the mean was $5,889. The median income in 1970 for the county's 1,255 rural farm families was $4,252 and the mean was $5,256. The income for Newport's

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[3] See Appendix II for a statistical breakdown of "Years Of School Completed" (Table I), "Manufacturing In Cocke County Tennessee" (Table II), "Professional And White Collar Employment, Cocke County, 1970" (Table III), and "Income Of All Families, Cocke County, 1970" (Table IV).

1,938 families was slightly higher with a median income of $6,148 and a mean of $6,669 (Ibid.) Of the county's total number of families, 29.3 per cent receive incomes below the poverty level while some 21.3 per cent earn incomes of less than 75 per cent of poverty level.

In general, Cocke County can be viewed as a small, light industrial center that provides considerably more employment opportunitites than many Appalachian counties. This explains in part, why the county experienced an 8.1 per cent population increase between 1960 and 1970. Urban population increase for those years was somewhat higher at 13.6 per cent. (U.S. Census, 1970).[4]

Participants at The Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name are employed in a variety of manufacturing and related occupations in Newport and surrounding areas. Only a couple of families are directly involved in agriculture. Neither family is totally dependent on agriculture: In one family the husband works at a cannery and the wife at a local motel (their combined income exceeds $12,000 in a good year); and, in the other family the husband is employed by a commercial milking operation. The other males in the church are employed in a variety of occupations: at the two local canneries, Stockley Van Camp (Newport) and Busch's (Dandridge, Sevier County); at various auto related subsidiary industries of large Detroit companies (many of these plants manufacture specialty items such as filters or electronic components); for the State Highway Department; in poultry processing; and logging, carpentry, or construction.

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[4] See Brown and Hillery (1962:54-78) for a discussion of changing demographic patterns in Appalachia.

. Teenagers in the church, who have dropped out of school, frequently work as service station attendants or at low-paying factory jobs. One member of the church is self-employed commercial artist and two saints jointly own a tree-triming company. The pastor of the church is a long distance trucker for Stokley Van Camp and earns in excess of $20,000 a year. One saint formerly operated a small grocery store. Also, one brother works in Knoxville (50 miles to the west) at a country club as a maintenance worker, as did the late Jimmy Williams. Finally, a few males in the church are (or were) involved in various government retraining programs.

A number of sisters in the church hold regular employment outside the home; working on assembly lines, at shirt factories, as cooks, chambermaids~~,~~ etc.. Women can earn from the minimum wage up to $3.85 or $4.00 an hour. Some factory workers operate on a piece work basis. (These wages vary according to the employee's productivity.) One member is a former FBI clerical worker in Washington, D.C., who is presently employed at a Federal office in Sevier County.

For both male and female workers, religious beliefs play a role in the type of employment sought. Saints ordinarily refuse employment at establishments where alcohol is sold or or consumed, or at jobs that require them to miss evening church services frequently. As alcohol was consumed at the country club in Knoxville where two church brothers worked, some degree of controversy developed in the church, a controversy that was never entirely resolved.

Regarding the socio-economic situation of serpent-handlers, it is interesting to note Brother Alfred's perceptions. In an interview Brother Alfred (tape recorded December 1974) stated that:

> . . . I guess there is no type. Seems like everybody else is always tried to say, well, well, there're lower, the poverty class of people who are illiterate and, it's simply not true. We have college people. We have many, many, many, high school graduates in this, and, our people hardly ever leave the faith. I mean our children that are raised up in this and go onto school, a high school and into college, they don't ever leave the faith. One thing that can be said for our faith, our people, our children don't go out of the faith, maybe one, and even the ones who don't live right, a, I don't know of any that denied it. Though they may be, become very, very educated and have LLD's and BBD's, all kinds of degrees added and letters added at the end of their name, they'll still tell you there's somethin' to it and it's real. Maybe, of course, there may be a few that. . . get away and say, well that was just something stupid that my ancestors did, but as a rule our people' stay in the faith and no matter how much education they get, it's somethin' that you don't get educated out of you, which is somethin' that a lot of other religions just can't say, and, there's no way to type it. . .
>
> There's some very, very well educated people in it, and then there are some, a, there are some who are illiterate, can't even write their name, a, but not many because there's not really an awful lot of people that are even in that stage now because of the education, but we have a few. 'Course, and I don't think there's really any other church that deals with people on a realistic scale that can say that they don't have some. We've got, I think, that we probably

> cover the whole range of professions and education and livin' levels. We have people who live in brick mansions and we have some who live in slum areas, dependin' on the church and where it's located. . .

Brother Alfred's view is similar to that of many saints. Saints often react strongly to news reports and books that portray serpent-handlers as poor and illiterate.

Alfred's account can be viewed similarly to saints' historical reconstructions. In both cases, either history or socio-economic profile, are appropriated for the creation of a religious identity that transcends the actual situation of the local group or of the religion as a whole. While Alfred is accurate in asserting that saints are not all illiterate and represent a fairly wide range of occupations and income levels, no one at The Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name has attended university or is in the professions. On the whole, saints lack formal education and most in the church have not gone to school beyond grade 8. Even many of the younger members tend to drop out of school at around the age of 16. With respect to housing and other possessions, it is incorrect to assume that all saints live in poverty shacks that lack indoor plumbing. Saints' homes vary widely. Some live in small, rural frame dwellings while others live in modern brick or frame ranch type houses in middle class type suburban neighborhoods. Other saints live in mobile homes. Similarly, while some saints drive old pickup trucks, others drive relatively new cars that have such accessories as air conditioning, power steering and brakes, and tape decks. Many saints spend considerable money on musical instruments such as electric guitars, amplifiers, and drums. Brother Alfred, for example, owns a large amplifier that is valued at close to $2,000.

As mentioned above, saints represent a wide range of income levels. Although mostly working people, serpent-handlers who have union jobs or skilled positions such as truck driver or railroad crewman, often earn upward of $20,000 per year and live quite comfortably by local standards.[5]

Contrary to Gerrard's findings for Scrabble Creek (1966a) that serpent-handlers represent the "stationary poor", many of the Newport saints appear to have upwardly mobile aspirations. The church's pastor, for example, emphasizes the number of friends that he has who are among some of the wealthiest people in Newport. He recently moved from a rural, rented "shack" to a bungalow that he purchased in Newport. Since 1969, his income has more than doubled. Although, other saints' accomplishments are not quite as dramatic, many reflect this pattern.

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[5] It must be kept in mind that the cost of living is somewhat lower in rural and semi-rural Appalachian counties than in North American urban centers. Houses can be purchased or rented quite cheaply. In addition, the larger network of saints provides an adaptive advantage for members who are in need, as brothers and sisters can be relied on to provide financial and other help in times of crisis. "Love offerings" are taken up in the church for needy members who are out of work because of serpent-bite or illness.

This is not to suggest that all or most saints are without economic worry. With the recent recession conditions in the United States,saints face the prospect of being laid off as a number of subsidiary branch plants have closed or temporarily cut back production. For many saints to earn an adequate living to support their families, both husband and wife must work. When companies lay off workers, many saints have little or no savings to fall back on and consequently lack the resources to insure an adequate diet or housing. Consistent with Gerrard's findings young serpent-handlers often encounter great difficulty finding and holding low paying, dead-end jobs. This often results in considerable frustration, repeated migrations in search of employment, and a life of general economic insecurity. Many of the saints in the church have lived for periods of time in Detroit, Cleveland, various Southern New Jersey cities, and in smaller regional centers. Most, ultimately, were unhappy in these new environments and returned to Tennessee.

CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

Although saints aspire to remove themselves from the world as a "separated people", they, nevertheless, must earn a livelihood in the secular society. Most saints, it is safe to say, derive their primary identity from their status of saint rather than from their occupation or position in the secular community. Serpent-handlers' concept of earning a a living is rather complex. On the one hand, members view earning a living as a necessary evil that, in many cases, is barely tolerated, as working in the secular world can serve as a distraction from the things of God (as well as provide worldy temptations). As expressed by Brother Gerald from Greenville, South Carolina (fieldnotes, Saturday July 22, 1971) ". . . if more of God's people would give to the church, preachers wouldn't have to work as much for the Devil to get by". On the other hand, saints believe that the Bible advocates that preachers and saints in general should earn their livelihood by "sweat and toil". Preachers often condemn the fact that ministers in a number of large churches receive a salary rather than earn their livelihood through hard labor. So, in terms of identity, saints emphasize that preachers work and toil, just like the Apostles in the Bible, who had occupations.

Similarly, although Brother Alfred emphasized the notion that serpent-handlers represent all socio-economic levels, saints often express a disdain for the rich and powerful "among men". It is often debated whether or not a rich man can "make it to heaven". While, on one level, affluence and education are respected and sought after (at least by some), on another level they are considered to be "carnal" and therefore inimical to salvation. Religious songs like "Mansion In The Sky", and "A Shack On Earth, A Mansion In Heaven" emphasize a longing for a heavenly opulence while implicitly espousing the virtues of earthly poverty as a necessary precondition. Although saints, at least on one level, make poverty a virtue, they do not share a radical class consciousness or a strong feeling of being exploited. While expressing a critical view of the present order, they eschew involvement in politics, labor unions, or attempts at social change. (Similarly, saints refuse to take oaths in court, report lawbreakers to the sheriff, or serve in the military).

Finally, it is difficult to generalize too widely on the socio-economic situation of serpent-handlers. Although most work in a variety of blue collar and service occupations, sometimes notable variations exist with respect to income, housing, education, etc.. Similarly, individual congregations vary considerably with respect to socio-economic situation, depending on such factors as subregional ecology and condition of the national economy (recession or boom cycle). In this discussion, I have presented aspects of serpent-handlers' socio-economic situation. My purpose here is not to provide data with which to construct causative explanations derived from relative deprivation theory. Rather, my concern is to focus on socio-economic considerations in order to establish the context in and against which saints create an identity and sense of community. Chapter V, will explore further some of the considerations and processes involved in the notion of a community of saints.

CHAPTER V

A COMMUNITY OF SAINTS: DEFINITION AND IDENTITY

A COMMUNITY OF SAINTS DEFINED

As established in Chapter I, the designation community of saints is derived from the socio-linguistic concept of the "speech community". Gumperz (1972:16) discusses this concept noting that:

> To the extent that speakers share knowledge of the communicative constraints and options governing a significant number of social situations, they can be said to be members of the same speech community.

I take the terms of reference in the above general definition as specifying the basis of a community in general. Thus, to Bauman and Sherzer's (1974:6) focus on members' ". . . production and interpretation of socially appropriate speech" I have added, ". . . and by extension, other categories of behavior vis-à-vis specific ground rules" (Birckhead 1976).

The impetus to view serpent-handling as a community of saints derives from a number of theoretical perspectives that view social life as dynamic, emergent, and to be accounted for (see Bauman 1975). The specific thrust of my argument derives from Hymes (1973:36):

> What unites and maintains the community is problematic and to be discovered, with respect to speech and all aspects of life, though there is no doubt that interaction plays a crucial part. If mankind is social by nature, still the communities in which sociality is shaped and realized are not to be taken for granted.

> The origin, maintenance, and transformation of social order, the respective roles of concensus and conflict, the sources of persistence and change, these are indeed the central problems of social theory, illuminated but not yet resolved. To deny this in a conception of community is ludicrous sociologically in the same way that to deny underlying relations in a conception of syntax would be linguistically.

This view contrasts with traditional sociological definitions of a community--definitions that implicitly see communities as non-problematic givens:

> . . . a territorially-organized system co-extensive with a settlement pattern in which (1) an effective communication network operates, (2) people share common facilities and services distributed within this settlement pattern and (3) develope a psychological identification with the 'locality-symbol' (the name)(Sanders 1958:189).

The point of view discussed by Barnard (1973:4) is close to the way in which community is used throughout the thesis:

> 'Community', as distinguished from 'the community', emphasizes the common-ties and social-interaction components of the defintion. . . . It is characterized not so much by locale as by 'a high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion, and continuity in time' (Nisbet 1967: 47). A German term, Gemeinschaft, has been invoked to refer to community in this sense.

In definition the notion of a community of saints, emphasis is given to the character of social interaction, use of distinctive speech and other symbolism, and members' accomplishment of an identification with both the local and larger collectivity of serpent-handling saints. However, in emphasizing interaction, shared knowledge, or identity, Hymes' admonition must not be overlooked (Hymes (1973:42): "We must still not forget that shared knowledge, even sociolinguistic knowledge, does not 'naturally create community".

My emphasis on emergence and the problematic nature of community life is also indicated by the referent, saint. Sainthood in this religion is not ascribed, but must be continually validated through appropriate interaction. Gerrard (1968:23) notes a problematic aspect of being a saint: "After all, the claim that one is a living saint is pretentious even in a sacred society--and it is particularly difficult to maintain in a secular society." Seen in this light, saints must legitimate their claims amongst themselves and to an often skeptical secular community. Serpent-handling saints can sin, backslide, bungle ritual performances, or preach inappropriately. In this sense, then, an ideal community of saints is a goal that can be achieved only in the next world. As with Christianity in general, serpent-handling is striving for a perfection that is unachievable in the present order. Polanyi (1964:280-281) describes the Christian faith in general as ". . . a passionate heuristic impulse which has no prospect for consumation."

The community of saints can be viewed as "a community within communities" (Redfield 1956:113). First, serpent-handling communities do not exist as discrete, geographically bounded units but rather as interactional networks within larger secular communities. Saints reside in neighborhoods and in rural areas integrated with the population at large.

At The Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name, some saints live in the Carson Springs Community, some in Newport itself, some in the outlying settlement of Parrotsville; others in Morristown, Sevierville, etc.. In considering the dynamics of the creation and management of an identity, account must be taken of the distinction between a group's social identity, as perceived by outsiders, and the identities of individual members as fused within the group. In actual practice, individual and group identities are constituted out of the total interactional field encompassed by the above distinctions.

Second, serpent-handling groups exist within a larger religious community. While individual churches come and go, particular siants continue to practice the religion in private homes or, gravitate to a new organizational focus for their religion. Exact delineation of a serpent-handling congregation is difficult because of the permeable nature of these groups' boundaries and the fluidity of their membership. This is often overlooked because researchers and popular writers tend to focus on particular groups at one point in time, failing to grasp the group's embeddedness in a larger network of believers.[1]

Serpent-handlers share many facets of belief, worship, and religious lexicon with other fundamentalist groups, especially those in the Southern and rural Midwestern United

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[1] Arriving at a definition of communities has been a recurrent problem in anthropology. See Young (1974), Murphy (1964), and Moerman (1965).

States. With respect to lexicon, for example, serpent-handlers, alogn with many other "Christian", are distinguished by their use of referents such as: "brother", "sister", "saint", "sinner", "apostle", "Christian", "Holy Ghost filled person", "heaven and hell", "saved and damned", "Jesus", "praise the Lord", "amen", etc.. Obviously, serpent-handlers' unique identity derives from the activities of snake and fire handling, poison drinking, and the symbolic lexicon that developed around them (see Appendix I for symbolic lexicon of serpent-handling). Much speech, for example, is devoted to snakes ("serpents"); their acquisition, care, individual personalities, handling, exhcange, symbolism, bites, and the Biblical correctness of the practice.

With respect to communication boundaries, it is through the use of serpent-handling's specific lexicon and the relating of oral historical accounts, and accounts of particular experiences of working in the signs, that saints from Detroit to Florida can communicate with one another, distinctive from the rest of fundamental Christendom. Obviously, the main differences between serpent-handlers and participants in other Pentecostal churches is a matter of degree rather than of kind.

One way in which specific serpent-handling churches, as well as individual members, communicate their distinctive identity as serpent-handlers to other Pentecostals (as well as to other saints) is through the wording on church signs, preachers' calling cards, and newspaper advertisements. Thus, for example, the Dolley Pond Church Of God established its identity through using the appelation, "With Signs Following" in its formal title. Or, the Wade Chapel (located near Atlanta) proclaims on its sign that it is a church "with signs following the believers" (Vance 1975:128). The recently formed Jesus Christ Apostolic Church (Cocke County, Tennessee) subtly communicates its identity by stating on its advertisements that: "Th is a church where the commission Jesus gave His Followers Is In Operation Now". To those who possess the requisite specialized knowledge of the Bible (as interpreted by serpent-handling fundamentalists), "the commission Jesus gave His followers" indicates the five signs, in which serpent-handling and poison drinking are sanctioned. Similarly, the calling cards used by the late Jimmy Williams, and by Alfred Ball, included the notation, "Mark 16:15-20". Again, those who possess adequate knowledge would immediately know that serpent-handling, poison drinking, speaking in tongues, casting out demons, and healing the sick are practiced at the church.

In serpent-handling groups there tends to be a greater propensity for members to refer to themselves as God's people, a separated people, or a peculiar people, and as giants. Also, members generally agree that the designation Christian is synonmous with serpent-handling religion. Serpent-handlers do recognize, however, other fundamentalists as being within the general Christian tradition. As well, individual spirit-filled people of non-serpent-handling congregations qualify as Christian if they validate this label by working in the signs, following the Bible, and living a holy life. Thus, for example, members of a wide range of fundamentalists churches sometimes attend The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name and participate in the services to varying degrees. Some limit their participation to singing and testifying. Others, on occasion, have preached, spoken in tongues, or (more rarely) have taken up serpents.

As articulated by saints, the main difference between themselves and their fundamentalist "cousins" is the depth or purity with which they follow the Word. This notion is closely related to saints' ideology of being a separated people. The church is contrasted with the "modern" churches which are considered by saints to be "worldly", watered down versions of the truth. For example, Liston testified (August 13, 1972, WLIK Radio), denouncing ". . . the weak messages that are given in most churches" (fieldnotes). Or, Brother Johnny testified (November 17, 1972) that ". . . people in colleges and in the big churches were like cemetaries they are so dead, being ashamed to follow the Word of God" (fieldnotes). In a similar vein, Jimmy Williams testified that (fieldnotes, November 23, 1972):

> Mark 16:18, the modern churches try to ignore this Scripture. Also, they ignore the Scripture about

> drinking deadly poisons. Some people would be happy to put their serpents to rest for nine months and only handle them for three. At the First Church down in Newport, people don't take up serpents or drink deadly poisons. He likes acting on Mark 16: 17-18 as often as possible as that is one of the most powerful in the Scriptures.

On another occasion, Jimmy states (fieldnotes, November 1, 1972): ". . . that a lot of preachers have told him that they wished Mark 16:18 wasn't in the Bible. Jimmy said you can't have the rest without it".

Preachers also denounce the "big churches" that have "paid preachers". Liston (August 12, 1972, fieldnotes), for example, ". . . put down regular churches with high paid preachers and expensive, fancy buildings." He went on to say that "if preachers weren't paid, there wouldn't be as many preachers". Similarly, Jimmy preached (fieldnotes, November 15, 1972) against paying ministers or radio preachers:

> . . . Chruches that use tithes to pay preachers are wrong, and not acting according to the Word. Also, people who use their tithes to pay radio evangelists are wrong; that is not what tithes are for. . .

Saints criticize other churches for their worldliness. Speaking of Presbyterians (the church Jimmy was raised in), Jimmy Williams said (fieldnotes, November 30, 1972) that: "He was convinced that most Presbyterians weren't too serious about living the right kind of life. It was more for social reasons that they went to church". Or, as stated by Drew Click (fieldnotes, November 1, 1972):

> . . . being a Christian is not as easy as some preachers say it is. He mentioned Baptist preachers who said it was easy being a Christian. But, no wonder, as they watched games on television, etc. . . He said that he would find it easy also if he was allowed to go to dancehalls, watch T.V., etc., but that it is not the right way according to the Scriptures; serving the Lord is difficult. . .

Within the generalized serpent-handling community, considerable variation exists. Such variation includes the differences between "trinitarian" and "Jesus only"; and "free-love" and congregations that do not accept this orientation. Trinitarian churches baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while so called Jesus only groups baptize in the name of Jesus alone. This distinction between Jesus only and the Trinitarian orientation is expressed in most prayers, preaching, and casual conversation. In praying, for example, members of Jesus only congregations usually conclude their prayers with the phrase ". . . in Jesus Name, amen". Also, these congregations often include in their church names, the appelation, "in Jesus name". thus, The Holiness Church of God In Jesus Name, The House Of Prayer In Jesus Name, etc.. Trinitarian congregations, on the other hand, do not emphasize the name, Jesus. In fact, the use of this referent is eschewed and limited to very formal religious discourse or to the reading of Biblical passages in which it is contained, at some Trinitarian groups (personal conversation with Elifson and Tripp, 1976). The choice of religious songs sung at services of these opposing traditions also reflect the differences in orientation. The differences between Jesus only and Trinitarian groups probably represents the major cleavage between serpent-handling congregations and is the source of considerable conversation, debate, and argument.

The other major distinction between serpent-handling congregations is that between "free-love" and, for lack of a better term, non-free love groups. At so-called free love churches, such as the Scrabble Creek Church Of All Nations in West Virginia, members believe that God's people cannot lust in the Spirit of the Lord. Consequently, brothers and sisters kiss one another on the mouth, embrace, and dance in the spirit. Members of the church at Newport do not agree with the free love tradition. Although they believe that anointing can keep a saint from lusting when touching a person of the opposite sex, it is held that sinners would not understand this type of behavior and God's people could earn a bad reputation. Also, it is felt that many would take advantage if such practices were allowed in church, claiming that they were acting in the spirit when they were in fact acting in the carnal mind. Thus, when a free love preacher visits the church, saints comment on the fact that he "had a strange spirit about him" or, how they did not like the way he placed his hand on a sister's back, etc..

In addition to the above differences between serpent-handling groups, individual churches tend to use their own special terms, emphasizing particular passages in the Bible or interpretations of those passages, singing specific songs, and following slightly different rules of etiquette for serpent-handling, the use of the "Holy Kiss", the practice of "the Lord's supper" and footwashing, etc.. Also, different groups exhibit slight differences in the religious speech utilized by saints. Finally, churches vary with regard to dress code, beliefs concerning the use of television, the celebration of Christmas and Easter, roles open to women, degree of separation from the secular community, and numerous other small points of distinction.

On the whole, however, the differences that exist between groups are not that great that they obviate the concept of a generalized community of serpent-handlers united by a shared tradition and a common lexicon. Saints from the differing traditions frequently interact with one another, if only to debate and argue the merits of one tradition over the other. Similarly, saints from the various traditions exchange serpents with one another as well as engage in a variety of interactions that justify the concept of a generalized community of serpent-handling saints.[2]

A SEPARATED PEOPLE

One of the most common appraisals of serpent-handlers by non members is that they are "crazy", religious fanatics.[3] At The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name, sermons, testimonies, and everyday conversation contain numerous references to persecution or to the notion that saints are considered to be insane by the society at large. For example, Brother Brown testified during church service (fieldnotes, July 30, 1972) that, ". . . up there (Detroit), a man is persecuted for serving the Lord". Similarly, Liston Pack testified (fieldnotes, August 2, 1972) that, "they will persecute you if you love Jesus". At a service on August 12, 1972, Brother Pack stated that (fieldnotes), "Newport is a persecuting town, but there was little they could do as the church owned its own land buildings". On August 7, 1971 (fieldnotes), Liston testified that he had received "more persecution in the last week than during his entire life." With regard to group identity, it is often said by saints that "this is the most persecuted church around because, unlike other churches, the will of God is done".

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[2] Serpent-exchange is discussed more fully in Chapter VII. Although serpent-exchange is not analyzed in any detail in this study, it can be seen as a generator of interaction

In addition to the general references to persecution presented above, saints provide more specific accounts of

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between saints. Additional research needs to be done on this topic. See Birckhead 1975 for a brief discussion of it).

[3] With respect to the labeling of deviancy, Tripp (1975:46) lists two processes:

> The first involves the defining of a particular behavior or trait as deviant. The second process is the communication by those who have accepted the proposition that a particular act or trait is deviant to one who exhibits the behavior, or possesses the trait. . .

persecution they have experienced. Thus, Liston recalled that (fieldnotes, November 11, 1972):

> When the church was first started the devil was working hard to mess things up, as 'that's his job'. Liston was shot at as he was praying up in the hollow. Also the road was blocked and someone took his ignition keys or messed with the ignition wires on his car. . .

On another occasion, Brother Robert testified that (fieldnotes October 22, 1972):

> men where he worked jumped on him and wanted to fight because of the fact that he served the Lord. (He started crying as he testified). He was able to change jobs. The Lord was good to him in that. . .

What is interesting here is not only saints feelings of persecution but what they do with it. On one level saints capitalize on the notion that they "are crazy" as an in-group identity marker. The late Rev. Frank Necessary (just prior to his death in August 1971) admonished me to (fieldnotes August 15, 1971): "tell them up there (Canada) that I (myself) had been way over in the mountains of East Tennessee where the

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Tripp goes on to say that:

> The means by which society labels serpent handlers as deviant is through the use of various negative sanctions which the serpent handlers perceive as persecution. The perception of being persecuted and labeled is of paramount importance; whether, according to some 'objective' criteria, persecution truly occurs is irrelevant. The serpent handlers, as a group, believe that they are persecuted and they act on the belief. It is reality for them. (emphasis hers)

Tripp cites several examples of persecution reported by Georgia serpent-handlers.

people are 'fools for Jesus'". Jimmy Williams expressed a similar sentiment during a sermon (fieldnotes, July 23, 1972): "He said that people were saying that the folks up in snake hollow had gone crazy. I'm glad to get crazy in the carnal mind".

In many instances, saints have transformed these prejorative labels into "badges" of membership (Goodenough 1963:178). Thus, many of these labels are frequently expressed and even celebrated during church services. This is exemplified in the often sung religious song, "Holy, Holy, Holy", which many saints claim is their favorite song. In many ways, this song serves as an anthem for serpent-handlers (from various tapes of services):

They call us Holy Rollers; that's all right. . .[4]
They call us serpent-handlers; that's all right. . .
They call us Jesus only; that's all right. . .
They call us the tongue gang; that's all right. . .
They say we're of the devil; that's all right. . .
They say we've gone crazy; that's all right. . .
They say we worship serpents; that's all right. . .
They say we eat no breakfast; that's all right. . .

The refrain is:

Holy, holy, holy; that's all right
Holy, holy, holy; that's all right
Holy, holy, holy; that's all right
Just so I'm livin' holy, that's all right.

The term snakehandler is also used as an in-group identity marker. In a formal sense, the designation serpent-handler is considered most appropriate by saints as a referant.

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[4] Each stanza of the song is structured as follows:
"They say we've gone crazy; that's all right
They say we've gone crazy; that's all right

The term snakehandler is considered inappropriate by many and its use is often criticized, corrected, or preached against. However, saints often address one another as snakehandlers. Speakers and hearers in the church immediately recognize the irony in the term's use, as members are often mocked or chided by people using this perjorative label in the secular community. When used by saints in this way, the term snakehandler elicits laughter, humorous exchanges, and overall camaraderie.[5]

Developing from saints' sense of persecution is members' feelings of separation from the "things of this world"; i.e., what Ferrard (1966a:61) calls "other-worldliness". Serpent-handlers' other-worldliness is well known in the literature. As summarized by Kane (1974:256):

> The snake-handlers unequivocally reject the existing social order as corrupt and utterly beyond redemption. Their 'other-worldliness' and tendency to project their hopes and aspirations into the hereafter is reflected in such aphorisms as, 'We are in the world but not of it' and "We are just strangers passing through this world.' Accordingly, they adhere to a rigid and ascetic moral code, eschewing all forms of worldly pleasure, self-indulgence, and frivolity.

Similarly, La Barre (1962a:16-17), Gerrard (1966a:61-62; 1971: 106-107), Schwarz (1960:405-406), Stekert (1963), Cobb

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They say we've gone crazy; well, that's all right
Just so we're living' holy, that's all right."

Refrain, then next stanza.

[5] This is similar to U.S. black's use of the label "nigger" among themselves in certain contexts, while in other settings insisting on the use of labels such as "Afro-American", "black", etc..

(1965:65), and Tripp (1975:53-55) have dealt with the other-worldliness and separateness of serpent-handlers.[6]

The basis of saints' other-worldliness partially lies in their belief in the "Second Coming" of Christ Serpent-handlers share with Christianity in general this millenarian emphasis. While much of Christianity no longer emphasizes the immediacy of a second coming of Christ and the urgency of pursuing "holiness" in these "perilous times", small fundamentalist denominations such as serpent-handling churches persist in their strident millenarian stance.

Mark 13:8 depicts some of the conditions that will obtain just before the second coming of Christ (eg. "nation . . . against nation, . . . earthquakes . . . famines and troubles . . . false prophets . . ., perseuctions", etc.). Saints find ample evidence in the secular community and in the world in general of the deterioration into "Godlessness" that indicates that the end is near. Preachers frequently cites examples of this moral deterioration in order to emphasize the importance of "being ready". Brother Johnny, for example, preached the following (fieldnotes, November 30, 1972):

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[6] This theme that home is not in this world is expressed and reflected in various religious songs that are sung during church services and in saints' homes, including: "And I Can't Feel At Home In This World Anymore", "Mansion In The Sky", "I'll Fly Away", "I Can Almost See Heaven", and many others. Two verses from the song, "And I Can't Feel At Home In This World Anymore", illustrate saints' orientation:

> This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through,
> My treasures are layed up somewhere beyond the blue,
> The Angels beckon me from heaven's open door,
> And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.
>
> Up in gloryland we'll live eternally
> The saints on every hand are shouting victory
> The angels beckon me from heaven's open door-
> And I can't feel at home in this world anymore."

> . . . He mentioned the signs that told that these were the last days. Awful things are happening in the world. For example, there are churches in California and Florida where Lucifer is worshipped. There was a girl in California who stabbed her uncle and said 'praise Lucifer'. . .

Newport, with its reputation as a center for prostitution, bootlegging, gambling, illegal cock fighting, and general lawlessness, provides more than adequte evident for saints of the "perilous times" at hand. Many sermons are devoted to the theme of "perilous times". Jimmy Willims, for example, stated that (fieldnotes, July 8, 1972): ". . . this country was cursed by God for our wickedness. He talked about crime, wars, and many of the other tell tale signs of our afflictions." Following on this, much emphasis is put on the transiency of life and the need to be ready at all times. For example, the following excerpt from a sermon given by Brother Alfred Ball (tape transcription, Winter 1973, recorded by Brother Ralph Eslinger) illustrates this emphasis:

> . . . I wonder a lot of times if He was to suddenly come onto some of us, what would happen to us, amen; if He suddenly came on you right now, where would you go, amen, where would be your final end? Amen, what would happen to you if Jesus should come for you right now? Well, it's a possibility, amen. You're not promised another day. You're not promised another breath, amen, and little as you might think about it, amen, you're just a breath away from hell, or the Kingdom of God. Amen, just which ever place you made

> preparation to go to, amen, you're just one slight breath away from it. Now, a, amen, last night, there was a man thought had a long time to live and he went out of here, amen, just a few minutes before I came to church. There was another one thought he had a long time to live, but I don't know if he has or not, 'cause somebody just shot him full of holes, amen, not too far from where we're standing, amen. It's possibly that God could call on you tonight, so, amen, I want you to pray for me in this way. If there be anything in my heart that God wouldn't be pleased with, anything that God wouldn't accept, amen, if I had to lay down and die right now, then I'd like for Him to move it, amen. I don't want it to be there, thank God, Now, think about it, what does it really take, what will it really take to get in? Do you know, amen, do you know what it will really take, thank God? If you're not sure then you better be getting sure, amen, because you may be going home, amen, sooner than you think. . .

Because the end of time is near, much emphasis is given to maintaining an identity that is separate from the world. For example, Brother Ralph Eslinger (tape transcript, December 13, 1972) stated: "God said come out from among the world and be ye a separated person and I'll receive you saying the Lord". It is in this spirit that saints advocate a number of prohibitions of dress, public amusements, alcohol and tobacco, and other things thought to be "of the world".

Members of the church also attempt to maintain a separation from the medical profession and from lawyers. As seen by Jimmy Williams (fieldnotes, November 15, 1972):

> . . . When you are married to God, He is a jealous husband. When a man is married to a woman, he doesn't like her asking other men when she needs help. God is the only doctor and is jealous of other doctors being used. God becomes jealous when we rely on 'arms of flesh' to solve our problems. Also, God should be our lawyer as we shouldn't rely on 'arms of flesh' to solve our legal problems. . .

Church members also believe that as a separated people the laws of the state do not apply to them, in cases where such laws conflict with what they perceive as God's laws. As summarized by Jimmy Williams (tape recorded December 10, 1972):

> . . . You know, the best instructions I can give you tonight is to just obey the Lord. Whatever God tells you to do, you do that. Obey God. Its better to obey God than men. Amen! A lot of times we find ourselves trying to obey all of the laws of the land, and the Bible teaches to obey the laws of the land, amen. You shouldn't run the red light and the stop signs because they were put there for your own protection, thank God! Amen, then, but every now and then the laws of the land and the laws of God, they conflict and then, therefore, we have to take the laws of the Lord. Amen! It's against the law to take up serpents, amen, but it's not against God's law. It's just against the laws of the land. Amen! We as children of God, we don't obey that law. The laws of the land that come contrary to the Word of God, we just don't obey 'em at all. (Liston: 'Don't pay it no mind'.) Amen, amen, I told the sheriff down there that I wasn't goin' to obey that law. We'd take care of the laws of God and for him to take care of the laws of the country. . .

Although saints claim to be "in but not of the world" and a "separated people", they, nevertheless, selectively participate in the larger society. As discussed in the previous chapter, saints must live and earn a livelihood in the "world". Consequently, saints share in the life of the secular community. While serpent-handling's ideology advocates segregation from the world, not all saints achieve this ideal equality well. The fact that this theme is emphasized so often by preachers (as shown in the preceeding excerpts) offers some indication that being "a separated people" is problematic for saints.

So far in this discussion, the focus has been on serpent-handling as a group, a collectivity. On the individual level, wide variations exist. A saint's identity as a person separated from the world is not fixed, but must be maintained and validated. Group norms are quite fluid and constantly in process of redefinition. As already touched on, a number of issues can prove problematic.

The issues of television, dress standards, public amusements, smoking, drinking (both alcohol and coffee), and relying on doctors and lawyers, engender considerable controversy and debate in the church. Saints who are vigilant regarding these matters sometimes testify to that fact during church services, implicitly and explicitly condemning those who are less enthusiastic:

> Brother Jimmy preached against watching television. When he started preaching on this topic, Brother Robert turned around and smiled at me and made a 'crazy' sign with his finger to his wife. On Wednesday, October 25, 1972, I casually talked with Brother Robert about television and other issues. He gets angry at brothers like Jimmy who preach against T.V. He says that if T.V. keeps you away from church that could be bad, but you might as well condemn radios and newspapers. The Word of God could be preached on T.V. The church should put on a T.V. program. He said that anyone who talks against T.V. is a little 'cracked'. . . They're good boys, though. Some just have weird ideas. He enjoys some things on television. (Fieldnotes, October 25, 1972).[7]

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[7] By the late winter or early spring of 1973, Brother Robert had left The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name and formed his own church near Morristown, Tennessee. His disagreement with the church's stance against television was but one of a number of reasons that caused the brother to leave.

Probably the most volatile issue raised in the church concerns sisters' attire. In sermons and testimonies continual references are made to the issue of sisters wearing short dresses, tight clothing, makeup, etc.. Also, sisters are admonished against cutting or styling their hair (as the Bible warns against it). Regarding female dress, Brother Jimmy stated during a service (fieldnotes, November 22, 1972) that:

> He was glad that Holiness sisters were looking like Holiness sisters again and wearing long dresses. There was a time when it was hard to get long dresses. Holiness sisters should look the part and not look like burlesque girls.

During this period of the church, considerable emphasis was placed on women wearing long "granny dresses". The issue caused considerable division in the church as not all sisters or brothers liked "granny dresses". The main proponents of the long dresses, initially were the pastor, assistant pastor, and their wives. Others soon became convinced of the correctness of this stance. People in the church tended to take sides on the issue. In the end, no one uniform standard of dress was agreed upon or imposed, and the question would continue to be probelmatic.

Similar issues, debates, concerns, and controversies develop in the church concerning appropriate dress for brothers, the use of alcohol and tobacco, and the visiting of zoos, amusement parks, bowling alleys, and, appropriate places of employment for saints to work. There is no need to detail all of the numerous cases. The underlying concern is basically the same in all of the above cases. As expressed by Brother Gerald from Greenville, South Carolina (fieldnotes, July 22, 1972): "Holiness people were losing their faith and being attracted by the world". He went on to say that ". . . teenagers think that they can have the gifts and the things of the world also; not so".

The emphasis then, is on the "hard, narrow, pure" path that one must follow in order to validate being a saint. This strictness in everyday life is considered important by serpent-handlers because, as expressed by Brother Gerald (Fieldnotes, July 22, 1972): "A slight love of the world can put a man in hell". Underlying saints' emphasis on a Holiness lifestyle is the expectation that if such a way of life is followed, members can gain access to supernatural power for the performance of various rituals and for general use in everyday life.

AN IDENTITY IN FLUX

Serpent-handling congregations are in a dynamic tension between the things of the world and their strivings for a separated life. By demanding a high degree of visible commitment, the church is involved in an ongoing effort to maintain a strict boundedness from the larger society. The boundary between saints and the wider community is a flexible one which swings back and forth between polar possibilities.

These fluctuations between greater worldliness and withdrawal vary depending on such factors as; leadership, composition of the membership, size and age of congregation, persecution, tenor of general relationships with the larger community, etc.. It is within this continuum between the two extremes that individual saints and churches negotiate their identities in a myriad of ongoing interactions, both within and without of the community of saints. Many saints tend to be quite experimental in assuming an identity. For a period of time, three of four brothers in the church wore all black clothing as a symbol of their separation and to show that they "were always in mourning for sinners" (fieldnotes, 1972). Presently, all but one of these brothers has abandoned the practice. Similarly, individual saints will experiment with not drinking coffee, tea, pop, etc. for a period of time and then abandon it. Sisters will not cut their hair and will wear long dresses only to cut their hair and return to wearing shorter dresses. Saints sometimes go through a period where fasting and prayer are emphasized, later to be de-emphasized. A young church like The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name is constantly in process of defining itself, and continuous experimentation is an integral part of this. Particulars of worship are adopted only to be later discarded and perhaps adopted once again.

On the individual level, the boundary between serpent-handlers and the secular society is a permeable one. Sinners become saints, but saints can always backslide and revert to sinner status. As membership in serpent-handling churches is through conversion rather than ascription, all saints were once sinners. Individuals in the church, at least in part, create their identities as saints against the backdrop of their sinful pasts, and against ongoing encounters with temptations and actual backsliding.

Part of a saint's identity is derived from the fact that through conversion he or she was saved from a life of sin and degradation. The greater the transformation, the greater credit that must be given to God. Thus, saints give considerable emphasis to accounts about the depths of sin and despair that they once experienced. At a Brevard, North Carolina tent revival in 1972, Brother Lester Ball testified that (fieldnotes, Jyly 28, 1972): "Before he found Jesus, he used to be a mean fellow and fight, etc.". Of his sinful past, Brother Liston related the following to Jimmy Williams and myself as we were driving back from a church service in London, Kentucky (fieldnotes, November 26, 1972):

> Liston said that a few years ago he used to stay up all night gambling. This is bad for your health. In the name of sinful things, people will stay up all night and ruin their health, but when church goes a little late, people get restless and want to leave. Liston used to make a lot of money at gambling because he cheated. He had a bed there and would just take naps now and then. He also used to swindle tourists out of money. Once he went on a drunk and beat up the police chief. Later, after he was saved, he testified to the parole officer for almost an hour and read from the Bible. Liston used to take pep pills. Once he punched in a plate glass window with his bare

> hands to break into a drug store to get more pills. It took about five men to subdue him and they needed a club. Liston has also spent time in jail on a manslaughter charge.
>
> Liston also used to be real skinny. He also used to be nervous and shaky much of the time. In fact, just a couple of years ago, Jimmy used to get irked at Liston when they would travel together, as Liston would get so nervous and shaky that he asked Jimmy to stop the car every little while to calm him down. Now, Liston is over that, and since he has given up more things of the world he has gained weight and has been healthy. A man in Newport who knew Liston in the old days says that Liston is a walking testimony to the Lord, since Liston should have been dead by now (because of the life that he led).

Liston concluded the discussion of his sinful past by saying (fieldnotes, November 26, 1972) ". . . that he shouldn't think and talk about his sinful past, as that was in the past". For Liston and other saints, the rule seems to be that one's sinful past can be selectively recollected and presented (for the purposes at hand), but only to a point. Such recollections must be tempered and not over emphasized. Sometimes saints' accounts take on a tone of braggadocio as saints attempt to show how much the Lord has done for them (who were once so sinful).

Accounts similar to the above are also rendered by saints who have repented after having "backslid". As in the above cases, these types of accounts emphasize God's mercy and his power. Such accounts can serve as a type of confession and/or an expression of humility on the part of the repentant sinner.

Another aspect of saints' identity creation and maintenance reflective of the permeable boundary between saints and the secular society is saints' selective involvement in that society. Saints engage in a variety of relationships with members of the society at large to further the ends of the religion. Not only are converts found, but individiual saints validate their identity as apostle, evangelist, man of God, etc.. Not only are saints' identities fused through the interaction with sinners, but also through the reporting of the interaction to the community of saints. The extent that serpent-handlers actively proselytize varies with respect to church and to individual saints within churches.[8] Proselytizing, like most other aspects of church life, is not a fixed or steady-state type of quality in serpent-handling churches. Rather, its frequency and intensity vary depending on any number of internal and external circumstances. During the early days of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name, saints openly handled serpents on the streets of Newport and in non-serpent-handling congregations. In recent years, saints have engaged in such practices much less frequently.

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[8] There is some disagreement in the literature concerning the degree that serpent-handlers proselytize. Tripp (1975: 48), for example, who develops a perspective on serpent-handling as a deviant subculture writes: "Because the serpent-handlers do not proselytize, they can in no way be construed to compromise a social movement. The inhibition about proselytizing emphasizes the secretiveness of this deviant subculture". Her findings are not borne out at The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name. This is not to deny that the church in Georgia where Tripp worked eschewed proselytizing. Considerable variation exists between churches, especially between "Jesus only" and Trinitarian" groups. Tripp's findings were for a "Trinitarian" congregation.

Saints do, however, continue to preach and testify about their religion in public places within the secular community. Both The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name and The Jesus Christ Apostolic Church continue to have a weekly radio broadcast in which serpent-handling and the practices of the church are emphasized. Saints are encouraged to let their "light shine" (fieldnotes, December 10, 1972). Brothers and sisters frequently give accounts of particular instances in which they testified to sinners in the community about the church. For example, Liston Pack testified about how (fieldnotes, July 6, 1972): "He went into a barber shop in Newport and told the barber about eternal damnation. The barber became so upset that his hands trembled and he had to sit down and quit cutting hair". On another occasion, Liston testified about how he had been preaching in bars of Newport. He reasoned that (fieldnotes, July 9, 1972): "The Word must be preached wherever sinners are found".

On any number of occasions saints in the church proclaim their beliefs to the secular world. With respect to this, preachers often emphasize that "if the people don't come to you, you've got to go to them" (fieldnotes, July 28, 1972). In instructing a young serpent-handler who was holding a tent revival in Brevard, North Carolina, Jimmy Williams said: "Just take a box of serpents with some music and the people will come. That's what we do over at Newport. We handle serpents at a gas station in town and the people gather around".

Regarding the tent revival, saints made the point that it was being held "next to a bar, nightclub, and bowling alley--places of sin" (fieldnotes, July 22, 1972). In the case of the tent revival, the strategy of locating it next to places "of sin" proved fruitful. Near the end of the service two black couples walked into the tent and were welcomed by the saints. One of the men gave $4.00 to the collection and stated that "he had been on his way to buy liquor when he saw the tent and this saved him from buying it" (fieldnotes, July 28, 1972).

On the whole, saints do not practice their religion in secrecy, but are quite open about it. Saints are not ashamed of appearing in public carrying Bibles, serpent-boxes, or wearing plain clothing. Also, saints appear quite willing, in fact, seek opportunities, to testify about their beliefs. Through doing this, saints validate their identity as Holiness people. This is illustrated by the interaction that Liston Pack had with a waitress in a truck stop near Knoxville (July 19, 1973). The waitress asked Liston "what we were drinking" and he replied that he did not drink because he was a Holiness preacher. It is interesting to note that this particular truck stop did not serve alcoholic beverages, so, in a practical sense, it was unnecessary for Liston to respond to the waitress as he did. His response must be seen as an attempt to express his religion to the world.

Jimmy Williams and Alfred Ball often picked up hitchhikers to testify to. Or, Brother Johnny (fieldnotes, November

16, 1972) encouraged brothers to: "Greet men on the street and on the job as you would greet them in church, with a hug. Don't be ashamed of what people say or think". In all of these cases, serpent-handlers are inviting persecution and harrassment from the world. As summarized by Gerrard (1966a:68):

> Members of the Holiness movement are well aware that they follow a religion most Americans consider absurd, and they are far from insensitive to that fact; despite their conviction that theirs is the one true church. In fact, some imply that they would welcome a little of the Old World persecution as a sign they are at least being taken seriously.

CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this discussion, the community has been seen as emergent, in process, and problematic. Following from this, saints' individual and collective identities are in flux and dependent on continual interactional work for their creation and maintenance. Saints' accounts of being separate provide an example. Separateness as an ideal is generally agreed upon by saints, but its exact meaning and achievement are open to negotiation and interpretation.

This discussion has not exhausted the topic. Subsequent chapters will pick up on and amplify the themes of identity and accounting practices. Conspicuous by its absence in this chapter is an analysis of saints' concepts concerning supernatural power and its uses. Crucial to members' sense of being "a separated people" is that of being a special people, or "God's children" who have access to supernatural power. These concepts are integral to a serpent-handling identity and sense of community. Before focusing specifically on saints' concepts of supernatural power and its uses, the social and activity structure of the community will be examined.

CHAPTER VI

SOCIAL AND ACTIVITY STRUCTURE OF A COMMUNITY OF SAINTS

GENERAL STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

To understand the dynamics of internal organization of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name, examination is necessary of its social organization and relationships to other serpent-handling groups. Inferences may then be drawn about factors of importance in the formation and maintenance of the community. Moreover, leadership, role performance, and community activities cannot be understood fully unless they are seen in the context of the entire social organization.

In organizational structure, serpent-handling churches may be seen to conform with the traits formulated by Gerlach and Hine (1970) in the analysis of the social organization of Pentecostal, Black Power, and other "movements of social transformation". Gerlach and Hine characterize them as being decentralized, segmentary, and reticulate groups which lack central authority, a well-defined chain of command, and hierarchic leadership.

Describing decentralization, Gerlach and Hine (1970: 35) label such organizations as "headless" or "acephalous" and, using what they call more accurate terms of description, "many-headed" or "polycephalous". In this type of structure, they state:

> . . . there is no political or decision-making authority above the level of the local community or localized clan or lineage of kinsmen. Furthermore, political control even at the local level is often diffused and quite flexible.

Leadership develops on a basis of being "first among equals", especially in personal ability and charisma. The practice in Pentecostal groups of having many leaders is related to the concept derived from earlier Methodism known as "the priesthood of all believers". This social levelling is reflected in the custom of saints' addressing and referring to one another as "brothers" and "sisters".

In serpent-handling churches, the concept of the "priesthood of all believers" is also manifested in other ways. Most congregations have between five and fifteen preachers. As will be discussed in greater detail, even the pastor and assistant pastor of a church cannot make decisions that are binding on all members or serve as spokesman for the group as a whole. Leaders cannot assume that they speak for the group as a whole on matters of belief or Biblical interpretation. Furthermore, leadership, and membership, are not ascribed statuses but depend upon performance. Regularity of participation, personal charisma, and manifestations of spiritual gifts are matters of great importance in achieving positions of leadership. In other words, statuses must be continually validated by appropriate behavior, although, as later discussion will bring out, considerable latitude exists in ideas of appropriate performances of roles.

In discussing the "segmentary" structure of religious movements, Gerlach and Hine (1970:41) focus on "fission and fusion". Such movements are described as being ". . . composed of a great variety of localized groups or cells which are essentially independent, but which can combine to form larger configurations or divide to form smaller units". In serpent-handling groups, fission is a common process. Since the formation of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name in 1969, three congregations have developed from it, and members of the church have been instrumental in the establishment of at least three other churches that did not represent fission from the "mother" church. Four factors may be identified as contributing to the splitting of congrega= tions (ibid., p. 42):

(a) an ideology of personal access to power
(b) pre-existing social, personal or geographical cleavages
(c) competition
(d) ideological differences

With regard to the "reticulate" nature of movements, Gerlach and Hine (1970:55-63) describe them as organizations ". . . in which the cells, or nodes, are tied together, not through any central point, but rather, through intersecting sets of personal relationships and other inter-group linkages". They ". . . constantly split, combine, and proliferate" . . . (and) ". . . are linked into a reticulate macrostructure". This type of larger reticulation is facilitated by:

> . . . personal ties between members, personal ties between leaders, travelling evangelists, ritual activities, national or regional associations, ideological linkage, and extra-movement linkages.

The types of linkages listed above exist among the serpent-handling communities of the nation from Michigan to Florida. The external relations of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name include various of the links described above that help to form the national network.

Members of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name, for example, visit serpent-handling churches in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and other parts of Tennessee. As well, saints from a number of centers visit the Newport church. Visiting between congregations most frequently occurs during special events such as revivals, homecoming services, special singing, etc..

Travelling evangelists provide additional ties and linkages between groups. Not only do they conduct revivals that often attract saints from a wide area, but less obvious functions of the evangelist include (ibid., p. 58), ". . . reporting of trials and triumphs of the movement elsewhere, request for support for groups not otherwise organizationally connected, and the communication of ideological refinements".

The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name is not formally affiliated with national or regional religious conferences, but is loosely aligned with congregations in Middlesboro, Kentucky; Brevard, North Carolina; Greenville, South Carolina; Kingston, Georgia; and with individual saints in Chattanooga and Monterey, Tennessee. Similarly, considerable interaction takes place between members of the church and its "daughter" congregations at Morristown and Newport, Tennessee; and at Marshall, North Carolina. Most serpent-handling congregations are connected in this way to small networks of churches which share similarities of doctrine (Jesus only vs. Trinitarian) practice (free love or not) or, are geographically proximate. These informal alliances appear to be well established among a number of long standing Trinitarian groups in Kentucky, West Virginia, and Georgia (see Vance 1975:127).[1] The alliance of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name are not yet highly formalized. This is largely a function of the group's relative youthfulness.[2]

In addition to religious linkages, the church has established a number of beneficial ties with the larger secular society. The church, as already mentioned (Chapter III) receives numerous letters of support and cash offerings from across the Western World. As well, researchers, writers, lawyers, business men, and other professional and semi-professional people have volunteered their particular services to the church. Most recently, the American Civil Liberties Union volunteered to aid the church in its legal struggles. Students of serpent-handling have often overlooked these wider ties that saints establish, preferring in many cases to view the groups as isolated rural cults that lack a larger social connectivity. The types of extra-group ties mentioned above may be viewed as important resources in the creation and maintenance of a serpent-handling community.

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[1] Usually, in such alliances, each of the four to six participating churches hosts a Sunday afternoon service on a rotating basis, with members of the other churches attending.

[2] It is interesting to note that church visitations can serve as a catalyst to innovation. Liston and Jimmy attempted to establish loose alliances with other churches after their visit to churches in Kentucky where alliances were well established. Similarly, songs, styles of handling serpents are learned and borrowed from congregations that are visited.

Finally, the reticulate structure of serpent-handling is further developed through members' shared mystical experiences ("Baptism of the Holy Spirit"). These serve as a means of organizing the differences of interpretation and practice exisitng between independent churches. Gerlach and Hine (1970:60-61) note that:

> In spite of the fact that personal, organizational, and ideological differences continually split groups, the conceptual commonality of the Baptism experience and the conceptual authority of the non-human leader provide a basis for continuing interaction between the resulting splinters. United in core belief, the Pentecostals can proceed to unite against genuine opposition, or against what they believe to be opposition.

INTERNAL STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP

Most studies on serpent-handling summarily dismiss the question of internal church structure and leadership. Cobb (1965:58), for example, states that (regarding the Pine Mountain Church Of God):

> There has never been any kind of formal organization, or any regular routine, except for the understanding that meetings are held regularly at the church house

> on Saturday and Wednesday nights and Sunday afternoons.

She also provides a description of a "typical" church service at Pine Mountain and suggests that (Ibid., 73): "The role played by the preacher is that of both superior and equal, leader and follower and equal sharer in all activity"; and concludes by saying that (Ibid., p. 15):

> Rank in the group is dependent on the gift of the spirit. The person who has demonstrated handling snakes, speaking in tongues, and handling fire, is distinguished, superior. His prestige is limited to the group, however. It does not extend to the society outside where his gifts are a matter of curiosity and ridicule.

Or, as summarized by Gerrard (1971:108) regarding roles in the church:

> While roles in the church are culturally stereotyped, i.e., dancer, singer, faith-healer, etc., enactment is almost completely unstructured and sponteneous. Role playing is very fluid, depending on the individual member's mood of the moment. Members who are passive on one occasion may dominate the meeting on another with their dancing and testifying. This constitutes an important appeal of the church, for if one feels the power of the Holy Spirit, there are almost no structural obstacles to immediate, untrammeled expression. In fact, such obstacles would be considered sacrilegious. This is one important reason why religious sessions are sometimes five or six hours long. No one would consider bringing the meeting to an end until every member who is so disposed had been given the opportunity to express his religious urges fully. . .

Gerrard (1966a:15-49) also provides a systematic description of a church service and makes additional reference to leadership roles and church structure. (Also, see Vance 1975:149).

In general, the above accounts are accurate, but overlook a number of issues pertaining to role and social structure. Specifically, social structure, leadership, and role, are reported on as being non-problematic. From Gerrard's description, one derives the image of an unstructured group that allows members almost complete freedom to follow the spirit wheresoever it may lead. In effect, Gerrard presents an account of members' idealized conceptions of church social structure. He does not deal with rules of etiquette, rules for breaking rules, ways members sabatoge certain performances; or, in general, ways in which saints utilize, manipulate, or negotiate roles and structure. Members' negotiated management of leadership and role will now be examined.

The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name is led by a pastor, assistant pastor, and a board of elders. The church's leadership categories are derived from the King James Bible. As described by Brother Alfred (tape interview, December 1974):

> Well, first off, the government for the church is an elder board, which usually consists of three ministers in the church, or three of the eldest people in the faith. Elder does not mean age in years, but age in the faith. Actually the Bible government is a bishop or a pastor and seven deacons. The churches try their best to follow it, this sequence as much as is possible, but, a lot of times they have to settle for less than seven deacons because of the fact that they must be blameless, the husband of one wife, without blame, and it's pretty hard to find people that can meet this qualification. Now we don't forbid people who have been married twice to come to church, but they are not allowed to be ministers in the church. . .
> The order for the church is a deacon, rather seven deacons, and a pastor, and usually you have a minister's

> role. There are usually two or three preachers may be ordained out of the one church and they usually comprise an elder board. And the deacon's job is just what the Bible says, to see to the fatherless and the widows and the saints in the congregation to kind of oversee them and if they get sick, check on them, see to it that they're not in need. . . The elder board, in order to have not a dictatorship but a kind of democracy in the church, they kind of get together and talk over the decisions that are being made and then the male members in the church--sometimes its only the male members and sometimes its only the deacon and the elder board and the minister's board that does the votin' to put in the pastors. The pastor and the assistant pastor are usually placed in their office by a majority vote of the male members of the church.

In describing the leadership structure of the church, Brother Alfred suggests that ideal structure is not realized. The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name does not have a bishop and has difficulty finding enough "blameless" saints to serve as deacons. Similarly, although not mentioned specifically by Brother Alfred, the roles of elder, pastor, and assistant pastor often are not performed in accord with Biblical dictates. Although the Bible establishes ideal role categories and specifies conditions for holding leadership positions in the church, it does not provide instructions for implementing these ideals in complex and ambiguous social settings. As well, the Bible does not provide specific criteria for evaluating role performance in varied situations. This must be interpreted and negotiated as interaction unfolds.

At issue here is: who has final authority in the church and how is this authority to be exercised? The question of authority is problematic on a number of levels. Ideally the church adheres to the notion of a "priesthood of all believers" and espouses democratic principles, but definite contradictions are discernable, especially regarding the office of pastor. The pastor in theory is elected, and subject to the elder board and to the congregation as a whole. Also, the pastor should live an exemplary life and demonstrate by his behavior that he is "led by the spirit". Problems do arise, however. The pastor of the church after holding his elected office for almost two years, discontinued church elections on the grounds that they led to confusion and competition in the church. Not long after this, he replaced his assistant with a member of the elder board. The elder board (composed primarily of saints in their 20's or early 30's) was politically weak and inexperienced and did not provide an effective challenge to his untoward action.[3] Thus, even though the ideal is a "priesthood of all believers", the pastor, if he is charismatic and persuasive, may set the tone of a church. Saints who disagree with him can attempt to challenge his policies, ignore his actions, or leave the church--either joining another congregation in the area or forming a new church.

This raises the question of social control. As the church espouses egalitarian ideals, the pastor and assistant

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[4] In this case, the deposed assistant pastor purchased his own church and started a new congregation (thereby becoming a pastor), taking a number of disgruntled members of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name with him.

pastor do not possess by virtue of their office any real coercive power with which to discipline members, or to impose on the congregation specific beliefs or interpretations of the Bible.[4] Instead, they must rely on preaching, testimonies, and example. Through these means, they, as well as other points can express their views, negotiate positions of faith, and establish their identities within the congregation. The issue of separation from the world illustrates this point.

As the church does not have a central authority to arbitrate matters concerning belief and behavior, participants have considerable latitude in defining the degree of separation that they maintain from the world. The principle that seems to operate here is whether or not the member feels "convicted" or "condemned" by his or her compromises with the world. For example, (fieldnotes, November 30, 1972) Brother Jimmy said: "That if he preached against smoking and he was still drinking coffee, he was condemned. You can't preach against hunting if you yourself are fishing". Similarly, if a saint watches television and feels guilty when the practice is preached against, then he is "condemned" and obliged to discontinue it. However, if the saint is not affected by the preaching he may be justified in continuing his practices. This can prove problematic and raises the issue of preaching as a means of social control.

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[4] Although in extreme cases, the pastor and board of elders can revoke a preacher's credentials or suggest that a member leave the church. Members are rarely asked to leave the church.

Occasionally the pastor (or other preachers) advocates that "un-Christian" behavior be eradicated from the church. This often results in controversy as individual saints may disagree with the severity of such proposals. For example, the pastor and his assistant expressed the following sentiments (fieldnotes, November 30, 1972):

> Liston said that we need to crack down in the church, as was done in the Church Of God when they were still in the Word. If a sister wore her dresses a couple of inches too short, her name would be removed from the register until she changed her ways. If she was the deacon's daughter and he protested, his name would be removed also . . . Jimmy said that for a good harvest, the weeds need to be cut out. Liston wants to crack down openly on non-Christian behavior in church.

The Brothers' strict stance also applied to prayer meetings in members' homes. Both men were dismayed that it was so difficult to find suitable homes in which to hold meetings as many members "didn't live right" and their homes were not fit places of worship. Specifically, Liston stated that (fieldnotes, November 30, 1972):

> . . . the prayer meetings in the homes are a good idea, but some homes that you go to are not in order--the T.V. set is going, you smell cigarette smoke, and girls in mini-skirts running around, and you have a bunch of boys and girls giggling in the back room. He told some one whose house he went to that he did not have his house in order. . .

In response to Liston's sermon, Brother Johnny replied that:

> . . .he would have volunteered his house, but there is a T.V. in the living room. Whenever it is on he leaves the room. He can't stand being around it. Both he and his wife want to get rid of it, but don't know what to do with it. If he gives it to someone else, then their kids will watch it and he will promote their doing what he wouldn't do himself. . .

All saints do not respond to criticism as magnanimously as Brother Johnny. In fact, criticism can cause saints to leave the church.

Related to social control and leadership is the role of women in the church. At The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name women are not allowed to hold office, to vote in church elections, or to make decisions affecting the church. Following from this, women are prohibited from preaching or teaching in the church. Similarly, sisters do not own, acquire, keep, exchange, or transport serpents. Women do not ordinarily handle serpents outside of formal church services. Reflective of their general position, women also do not have control over the various paraphernalia such as, serpent-boxes, viles of poison, blowtorches, etc..

So far, women's role has been seen in a negative light. Women, however, frequently serve as singers, (prophetesses in some churches) are allowed to work in all the thaumaturgical signs of the religion, and may testify during services. Not all sisters are content with their particular status in the church and some attempt to prolong testimonies into full fledged preaching. Also, in some small, independent Holiness congregations, women serve as preachers.

Before looking at specific church activities and the structure of church services, two other categories of persons in the church should be examined: preacher and evangelist.

Preachers are male saints who claim to be "called by the Lord" to preach. Saints may start preaching as young as age fourteen or fifteen. Young saints usually begin by giving brief testimonies and then work their way into longer sermons. Preachers do not attend Bible colleges or seminary. Rather, the role is legitimated through rendering credible performances. (See chapter VIII for discussion of preaching and performance). Preachers are ordained by individual churches. Usually when the elders of a church feel that a young saint has proved himself as a spirit-filled person who lives a Holiness life style, and has an adequate knowledge of the Bible, he is issued credential cards by the church during a brief ceremony. The church presently has between six and nine preachers. Preachers like pastors do not receive a salary. If preachers are found to preach heresy or to conduct themselves improperly, the church can rescind their cerdential cards; the point being that the role of preacher is not an ascribed or permanent category. The person must continually validate his status through appropriate preaching.

Evangelists travel as part of their ministry, conducting revivals and attending services at other congregations in the capacity of "visiting preacher". As mentioned in the preceding section, travelling evangelists play an important part in establishing ties between geographically dispersed congregations. The role of evangelist is assumed voluntarily by preachers who like to travel and who enjoy the opportunity of preaching to new audiences (especially to congregations who hold slightly different views of the religion). (Evangelists sometimes travel because of conflict in their home churches). In contrast to preachers, evangelist usually receive some financial reward for their efforts. It is customary for congregations to "take up an offering" to meet the travelling expenses of evangelists. As with preachers in general, the designation, evangelist, is not ascribed or permanent, but must be validated continually by appropriate performance.

ACTIVITY STRUCTURE

Formal church services are the primary focus for the community as a whole. Although, as mentioned throughout the thesis, informal visiting, impromptu serpent-handling, etc. occur frequently; they do not involve the whole community. Church services can be divided into four general categories: (1) worship services; (2) prayer services; (3) revival services, and (4) special services. Each type will be described briefly.

Worship services--Although all services involve worship, members' designation, "worship service," applies primarily to the Saturday and Sunday evening services. These "meetings" are usually well attended by saints, sinners, and visitors from other congregations. The overall atmosphere is generally one of celebration. Considerable singing, preaching, testifying, serpent-handling, and hand clapping occur. Weekend services can last from two to five hours. (These spirited services are usually emphasized in the literature).

Prayer services--Prayer services are held at the church on Wednesday evenings. The tone of these services tends to more serious and sedate than at weekend meetings. Wednesday evening services are usually not as well attended by saints or by sinners and visitors as are worship services. Prayer services provide an opportunity for members to pray together, hear sermons, and learn more about the Word. As most saints are tired from their days work, services seldom last longer than three hours. In fact, some prayer services last only forty-five minutes with only five or six saints in attendance. (This is especially so during the winter months when the mountain roads are icy and travel is difficult). The low-keyed tone of most prayer services departs from the usual description in the literature of frenetic church services. Serpents are handled at many Wednesday night services, but not as frequently as on weekends.

In addition to the regularly scheduled Wednesday night service, prayer services are held in members' homes (especially during the winter). Most of these small services do not involve the entire community, attracting those saints who live in the immediate vicinity. These services vary little from prayer services held at the church.

Revival services--Revival services are held on consecutive nights for periods of a week or longer. Revivals take place when a preacher claims that "the Lord" instructed him to conduct a revival, and continue until the preacher proclaims that "the Lord" told him to terminate it. This does not insure that the revival will be well attended or the preaching inspirational as it varies with the competence of the individual preacher. Revival services differ little from Wednesday night prayer services, except at revivals a greater emphasis is placed on delivering a "message".

Special services--As implied by the name, special services occur in response to specific occasions. Such occasions include: special singing services, weddings, or funerals. Special singing services are called when travelling gospel singing groups become available, and are held usually on Sunday afternoons. Such gatherings frequently attract visitors from a wide area. Although the primary emphasis is on singing, these services also involve preaching, serpent-handling, etc.. Special singing services are often combined with "dinner on the ground". The church's annual homecoming service (first weekend of July), is a large special singing service.

Other special services include funerals and weddings. Funerals are conducted either in the church or in private homes. The funeral service itself is brief and informal, with prayers being said, a eulogy, and hymns sung. Serpent-handling often takes place at funerals. Weddings, on the other hand, are seldom held in church, and are almost always performed in private homes or even along roadsides. Wedding services are even more informal than funerals, consisting solely of the couple exchanging vows. Wedding rings are eschewed. Serpent-handling rarely occurs at weddings.

In addition to church services, other activities in the community include: baptisms, court hearings, Bible study sessions, visiting other churches, and the church's weekly radio broadcast. As court hearings and visiting of other churches have already been discussed, my description is limited to baptisms, Bible study sessions, and the church's radio program.

Baptisms--Baptisms occur whenever a repentent sinner or recently converted persons feels "led by the Lord" to be baptized. Many baptisms take place late at night after the evening church service. Baptism is by total emersion, usually in the nearby French Broad River. (See Chapter VII for a discussion of the ceremony and the conversion experience.)

Bible Study Sessions--Bible study sessions are held during the day at the homes of saints. These study groups are comprised of women in the church and provide a social outlet and opportunity to discuss the faith and the meaning of Biblical passages.

The Radio Broadcast--The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name (as do many serpent-handling groups) conducts a weekly (live) radio broadcast. The church's program is fifteen minutes long and consists of preaching, speaking in tongues, and gospel singing. From two to fifteen saints participate in the broadcasts, which originate from the studio of a local radio station. The broadcasts are financed by donations from members or visitors to the church. Occasionally donations are received from listeners of the program.

As church services have been emphasized, the remainder of the discussion will examine their structure and components. This is intended to provide a framework for the more detailed descriptions and analysis of ritual elements to follow.

As conceived by members, church services do not follow a specific order or follow a planned format. The underlying principle is that order and direction are provided by the Spirit--"we just follow God". Members emphasize that saints have freedom in church "to do whatever God puts on them to do". This ideal is qualified, however, by the admonition that "everything is done with decency and in order". In other words (see Chapter VIII) the workings of the spirit are limited to socially appropriate behavior.

Given the above ideals, a great deal of flexibility is permitted in the format followed in any given service. Services, however, do consist of basic elements or components. These include: preaching, testifying, singing, the altar call, opening and closing prayers, and prayer requests.

Opening prayer--Most church services commence with an opening prayer. (Singing and even serpent-handling can occur prior to the opening prayer.) The opening prayer is signalled by the pastor's injunction, "all who will, come up to the altar and pray". The pastor (or saint who is leading the service) prays aloud, dedicating the service and asking God's blessing. Individuals who have congregated in the front kneel and individually pray aloud. Much glossolalia occurs, as well as shouting, hand-shaking, hugging, etc.. After a point, the rising crescendo of voices trails off and the service proceeds as members return to their seats, in the congregation, the "amen corner" (see appendix I), or with the singers.

Prayer Requests--Depending on the specific nature of the service, i.e., prayer or worship, special singing, etc., prayer requests may be taken after the opening prayer. In taking prayer requests a brother assumes a position at the front of the church and asks the congregation to verbalize their requests. One by one people stand up and ask for a favor from God. Or, a person will give a general request by saying, "you all pray for me". Between requests, the leader may preach, testify, or present a brief lesson. Prayer request "time" can last from five minutes to as long as forty-five minutes, depending on the leader and on the response of the congregation.

Testimonies--Sometimes, in lieu of or in addition to prayer requests, the preacher may ask people in the congregation to stand up and to "testify". This is structured similarly to the taking of prayer requests. The leader calls for individuals to testify and the persons stands up and states briefly what the Lord has done for him or her during the past week. These testimonies are often concluded with "you all pray for me". Between testimonies, the preacher may develop a particular point into a short sermon or lesson. "Testifying" can take place at almost anytime during the service and can be initiated by individuals in the congregation. What happens in any particular service seems to be a function of the individual interactions rather than a function of a rigidly laid out program.

Singing--The singing of spirited gospel songs is a regular feature of most services and comprises much of the service. Singing may occur before the opening prayer, before and after prayer requests are taken, before and after preaching, or at the close of the service. Saints sometimes pluck chords on their guitars to speed up a lingering or boring preacher or to signify that the "order of the service" is about to change.

The Message--This is considered the major preaching of the service and is delivered by one preacher. The message, however, is not formally prepared. At times, the pastor will ask preachers in the church, "who's got the message"? When a preacher accepts the challenge to present the message, he usually responds by saying, "that I really didn't plan to preach tonight, but if nobody else is got the message, I will give it". This type of preaching can last as long as two hours.

Preaching--Not all services feature a major message. During most services, however, some preaching is conducted. This consists of different preachers coming forward and presenting relatively short sermons or long testimonies. This type of preaching is often emotional and takes on the form of a chant. Such preaching can last from five minutes to an hour.

Teaching--Teaching occurs when a preacher wants to instruct the congregation on a particular point. This usually is not done in a chanted or spirited manner.

Offering--An offering or collection is taken up during most services. Money received in collections is used to pay the operating expenses of the church. It is not used to pay preachers. The pastor and other leaders of the church must earn their livelihoods at regular jobs. "Love offerings" are taken up when a member is in need.

Altar call--Altar calls are made near the end of the service. This is a time when sinners are urged to come forward and repent. Altar calls can either be dramatic or low-keyed. Often no one goes forward to repent or be prayed for. When sinners go forward and are prayed over, an altar call can last for a half an hour or longer, with the repentent person speaking in tongues, crying, or shouting.

Closing prayer--Church services are terminated with a closing prayer. This is signalled when the pastor announces that "it's getting late and it's time to close". He usually provides an opportunity for saints to testify or preach further. If no one comes forward, he prays aloud, along with the other members of the church. With the completion of this prayer, the service is dismissed. (Serpent-handling, poison drinking, fire handling, speaking in tongues, casting out demons, healing the sick, etc. have not been included in the above descriptive overview. Although these acts are important features of many church services, services do occur in which none of the above acts are performed. A detailed description of these ritual acts is provided in the following chapter.)

CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has discussed the social and activity structure of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name. The general social organization of serpent-handling may be seen as facilitating the formation of new groups and allowing for great flexibility. Individual groups are linked to other groups throughout the generalized community by a network of believers who may temporarily or permanently congregate around particular nodes or centers.

In looking at the internal and activity structure of the church attention was given to leadership, role performance, and social control. What emerges is the importance of religious power in defining and validating social behavior. The relationship between rule and behavior is an interesting theoretical question and, for the members of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name an ongoing practical concern. Following from this, I will now explore saints' beliefs about religious power (Chapter VIII).

CHAPTER VII

THE CONCEPT OF POWER

POWER AS DEFINED BY SAINTS

Serpent-handlers' definitions of power are derived from the King James Bible. The Bible serves as a source book for the uses and contexts of power and in literally hundreds of passages delineates what man must and must not do in utilizing power.

In addition to providing precedents and expectations regarding power and its uses, the Bible also provides the basis for and the components of a "lexicon of power" (see appendix I). Most of the lexical items in serpent-handling's specialized vocabulary are found in the Bible. This is not to suggest that serpent-handling's lexicon is fixed on the pages of the Bible. Nor is it to imply that the Scripture limits saints to a static, always predictable modus operandi when working in domains of power. Although the Word of God as presented in the Bible is immutable and provides numerous precedents for the workings of supernatural power in the carnal world, it does not insure against the distortion that inevitably results when precept is translated into act in the group setting. The Bible may be seen as presenting an idealized general code for human dealings with the Divine. Further elaboration and specification in this realm, however, develops out of individuals' day to day experiencing of power, and out of the ongoing and cumulative experiences and knowledge of church participants. This involves two dimensions: (1) members' mystical experiences and ritual manifestations of power; and (2) the ongoing, retrospective reporting of their experiences.

For saints one of the most fundamental and widely agreed upon attributes of power is that all power in the universe resides in God. I take this to be the primary invariable premise upon which serpent-handling religion is generated. This belief is established in Matthew 26:18: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, *All Power* (emphasis mine) is given unto me in heaven and in earth". Thus it follows that the power of Satan *is not as great* as it ultimately is derived from God's power. As expressed by members, "the devil can only do what God allws him to do and no more".

A second principle is the accessability of power. The experience of receiving power is referred to in any number of Biblical passages. Acts 2:1-4, for example, is important in this regard:

> And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they *were filled with the Holy Ghost*, and began to speak *with other tongues*, as *the Spirit gave them utterance*. (emphasis mine)

This establishes the expectation that acquisitions of power may be accompanied by audio-visual sensations. Also, the above text establishes a basis for speaking with other tongues as "the Spirit gave them utterance". Speaking in tongues is important in serpent-handling churches as well as in Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches in general.

The Scriptures contain numerous other references to power and the promise of power to saints and apostles of the church. Only a few of the more important references will be cited here. Acts 2:43, states: "And fear come upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles". Or, Acts 1:8 promises; "But ye shall receive power after the Holy Ghost has come upon you". Similarly, Acts 6:8 states: "And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people". And Acts 10:38 relates: ". . . how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good, and helping all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him". (Emphasis mine)

Power then, is seen by saints as deriving from God and as potentially available to man. This idea will now be further developed through an examination of the concept of "anointing"--its Biblical referents, physiological aspects, its characteristics and limitations.

ANOINTING

Acts 10:38 (cited above) also establishes the concept of "anointed. . . with the Holy Ghost and with power", to effect some action or outcome--"doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil". It is implied in the Biblical passage that through the act of anointing, Jesus was blessed with an infusion of power, which was the Holy Ghost.

Anointing, ideally, is conceived as an impersonal, egoless power. An act performed by the individual while "under the anointing power of God" is seen by saints as a reflection of God's power, not of the individual's skill or personal power. Members emphasize that people acting on anointing are "moved by the Lord", "moving in the Spirit", or "letting God do it". The emphasis is not on the individual per se, but on the individual as an instrument of the Lord. This ideal, as discussed in Chapter VIII, often proves problematic. Individual members who consistently receive "a good anointing" for taking up serpents, drinking poisons, or handling fire, are recognized and esteemed by the group for their spectacular performances. Conflicts arise when the ideal of giving credit to God clashes with the actual behavior of some saints who derive considerable ego satisfaction and identity from their thaumaturgical performances. It is difficult to generalize too widely on this point as members of the church approach the expressed ideal to varying degrees. Some saints downplay the fact that they often receive good anointing to take up serpents, etc. and are recognized for their "humble spirit". However, other participatns are noted for their vain, exhibitionism during ritual performances. The line between giving a good performance and exhibitionism is a fine one and can cause difficulties for saints. As conceptualized by saints, the conflict is between acting "in the Spirit" as opposed to acting in the "carnal mind". Given this general definition of anointing, a number of specifications follow.

Anointing power is believed to "work" in many ways. It facilitates singing, preaching, working in various signs (eg. serpent-handling, speaking in tongues), reading the bible (especially for poor readers or the illiterate); protects the church house from physical harm, protects saints from accidents, and maintains harmony in "Christian" homes.

Anointing is experienced in a personal way. Some compare the feeling of anointing to a mild electric shock, being struck by lightening, or various other alterations in normal motor activity. In response to the question, "Could you describe the anointing to me", Brother Alfred Ball stated (Barrett Video Tape, 1973), emphasis mine):

> Well, that is a very difficult thing to do, unless you've experienced it. The closest thing that I could come to describing the anointing, it's a feeling of power. A, as far as how it feels, this is very, very far from the actual fact, but the closest thing that I know of that people would understand what I'll be talking about would be a light, electric shock. It works this way a lot. It feels, it's not actually an electric shock, but it's something that feels similar to that. The anointing a lot of times works in, with me particularly in a feeling as if you would hold your hands over a hot stove. The

> feeling that you can feel the heat coming from the stove in your hands, and especially if I'm anointed for casting out devils. This is one time that I in particular feel this very strongly and it feels more like this power is coming, this feeling is coming from my hands rather than to them from something else. It feels like as if it were going from my hands into the person I'm praying for. . .
>
> That's the closest thing I can come to to describe the anointing to you. I don't get anointed that way to take up serpents, now. Some of the other brethern and sisters do have this particular anointing. With me, this anointing usually just covers the casting out devils. To take up serpents the anointing I have is more a knowledge. Of course, I feel the the spirit of God upon me and it blesses me. Now, this is for my own self, my own personal self. The anointing is more a knowledge, a voice of God speaks to me and says you can take up the serpent and I know in my heart that this serpent's not going to hurt me, not going to bite me, not going to hurt me, and I have not fear whatsoever of it. That's the way that the anointing works with me.

In the above interview, Brother Alfred emphasized the individuality of the anointing experience. Responses can vary depending on individuals, the intensity of power, context, and the use to which power is employed. Anointing can be indicated through numbness of the hands, mouth, tongue; palpitation of the heart; dryness of the mouth; loss of contact with the immediate environment; involuntary motor activity of the limbs and of the tongue; or through the perception of various shades of colored light.

Many in the church recognize specific physiological responses as being indicative of anointing to work in a particular sign. But as emphasized in the interview, the specific indicators can vary among individuals. Thus, some have reported that they interpret numbness in the hands or arms to signify a readiness to take up serpents. Numbness or heaviness of the tongue is often experienced prior to speaking with new tongues. For others, increased sensitivity of the mouth and/or throat is interpreted as anointing to drink "deadly things". For example, Liston reported (fieldnotes November 26, 1962) that he ". . . felt the anointing of prophecy the other day, as he felt a tingling at the rear of his mouth".

By way of further illustration (fieldnotes October 21, 1972):

> Liston . . . testified that he had so much anointing that his ear felt numb and his hands were out of control. He also mentioned that he could not unscrew the cap of the oil bottle . . . and that he saw everything as if through a haze. . .

Anointing is easily broken and transitory, subject to a variety of internal and external factors. Distractions, a congregation that is hostile to the performer, the recipient, himself, God, the Devil, are all seen as factors that could cause the anointing to dissipate and be ineffective. Liston, for example, mentioned that (fieldnotes, November 26, 1972): ". . . it was hard getting into the service last night because of the cross spirits there." Jimmy also felt the cross spirits and assured Liston and I that ". . . they could be overcome". Although as Brother Liston once remarked (fieldnotes, November 8, 1972), ". . . anointing usually comes at a difficult time"; there are difficult external conditions that only a very strong anointing can overcome. Saints ordinarily view "divisive" or "cross spirits" as one such condition. Sometimes divisive spirits can virtually paralyze a particular church service and all anointing seems to be blocked. Preaching and working in the signs seem to falter. Often when this occurs the service is dismissed after only half an hour or so. Preachers frequently comment that (tape transcription, August 20, 1972): ". . . the spirit isn't really running here a hundred per cent, but it, amen, it can".

Distraction can prevent a saint from receiving the anointing or cause him to lose it prematurely. Brother Alfred, for example, claimed that he "missed" the anointing to handle a serpent because he was distracted by his children (fieldnotes July 29, 1973). The anointing can lapse also if the person allows his thought to stray to worldly concerns. Liston stated that (fieldnotes, August 12, 1972): ". . . to get the victory you have to think about Jesus and not about bills to pay and other things". As summarized by Danny Smith (in Pelton and Carden 1974:51):

> When the anointing is upon a person, there's a protective hedge around him. This hedge is so strong that nothing can penetrate it. Even Satan can't get through. But if you get your mind off God, this makes a weak point in the hedge.

Anointing is only effective for specified periods of time. Saints need to know not only what sign the anointing is designated for, but also the time limites of its effectiveness. Liston stated that (fieldnotes, July 31, 1972): ". . . when the spirit anoints you, move not a minute too soon, not a minute too late, 'cause it's dangerous".

Two additional limitations placed on the power of anointing (by some saints) are: (1) that a person does not receive the anointing to work inthe same sign twice in succession; and, (2) that anointing is not given to a saint when everyone in the congregation has seen the sign performed in the past. This later condition is especially applicable to serpent-handling.[1] Two examples will suffice. Buford testified that (fieldnotes, August 16, 1972): "He was not going to handle the serpents as he probably would not be given the anointing. One does not get two of the same signs in succession. He had handled serpents just last night . . ." Brother Liston stated (fieldnotes, August 12, 1972) that:

> . . . working in the signs was to show sinners God's power. It would be nice to cast out devils all of the time, but we don't get the anointing all the time. He asked how many of us had seen serpent-handling. Everyone had seen it done. This is why, he explained, that he didn't get the anointing to take up serpents tonight. There was no useful purpose for it like there was that afternoon when he received the anointing to handle serpents in the presence of sinners. . .

Anointing is real, in that it allows its recipient to perform special feats with confidence. Members often express the maxim that, "it's impossible for you to get hurt in the anointing of God". As expressed by the late Rev. Jimmy Williams (tape transcription, December 1974): ". . . if God tells you to get in and take up serpents, amen, I don't believe the're gonna hurt you. . ." So, ideally, the performer of a sign knows that he/she can proceed under the anointing of God to act in the appropriate sign. In fact, saints maintain that anointing is at times so strong and compelling that one cannot refuse to act. Implicit in this is the notion that anointing can be of varying intensities depending on the task to be performed and, on the spiritual readiness of the performer.

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[1] As will be discussed in the next section, there are a number of contexts in which this informal rule does not hold.

As conceived by members, power is channeled through various "administrations" to effect specific ends. This is derived, in part, from I Corinthians 12:4-21 (King James Bible):

> Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestations of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. . .

Regarding this, Brother Alfred Ball explained that (tape recorded, December 1974):

> Alfred: . . . in other words there are different administrations and it would all come under the anointing. . .
>
> RJB: Under the anointing? So, preaching could be under one administration of it, or singing, or testigying, or. . .?
>
> Alfred: Yes, right, sure, yea, be under diff. . ., matter of fact, that's a good point because in the Bible when it speaks of the nine spiritual gifts, it speaks of differences of administration, but the same spirit. . . It's the same power that causes it all and there's different administrations for different gifts and there are different administrations for different individuals to . . . because its divided severally to every man as he will. . .

The concept of "diversity of operations" or of different "administrations" is important in saints' overall conceptualization of power. Saints view the different administrations as being tangible and real. Certain administrations or channels are said to provide greater and more reliable access to power than are others. A breakdown of the diversity of operations is depicted in Figure I. The diagram is not organized hierarchically. Each administration consists of a cluster of features with its own set of limitations, precautions, and conditions. The onus is on the saint to have a knowledge of the various administrations and to competently identify the meaning of events within this domain. This specificity provides necessary latitude in assigning meaning to events and is crucial to the social management of supernatural power.

In summary, this section has isolated attributes of power and its uses. Specifically:

A. Power is an egoless force from God
B. Power is experienced personally and individuals vary in their responses to it
C. Power is variable in intensity
D. Power is effective for a specific time duration
E. Power is function specific
F. Power implies effective action
G. Power is influenced by external factors

FIGURE I

DIVERSITY OF OPERATIONS (ADMINISTRATIONS)

9 Spiritual Gifts	5 Signs	Healing through Elders	Faith	Conversion	Baptism of Holy Spirit
Corinthians 12:4-12	Mark 16:15-18	James 5:14	Mark 9:23	Acts 9:3	Acts 2:38
wisdom knowledge faith* healing miracles prophecy discerning of spirits divers kinds of tongues interpretation of tongues	cast out demons speak with new tongues take up serpents drink deadly things lay hands on the sick				

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[*] Saints usually consider the Gift of faith a more reliable and unwavering source of power than the generalized faith spoken of in Mark 9:23.

1. divisive spirits
2. distractions
3. Satan
4. God

H. Power is influenced by Internal factors
   1. intention of saint
   2. focus on God
   3. pay the price

I. Power for working in signs is usually not given to same person twice in succession for the same sign

J. Power for working in signs is usually not provided in a setting where everyone has seen the performance of that sign

K. Power is administered and parcelled out via a number of specific channels

This list is not exhaustive or rigidly fixed. New rules and further specifications of old rules potentially can emerge from interaction, and derive from the open endedness of the above specifications.

ACQUISITION OF POWER

Following from the principle of the priesthood of all believers all members of the church have access of supernatural power, regardless of their role or position in the organization. Members' acquisition of power is usually viewed as a gradual process. It is believed that most saints do not experience power maximally when they are neophytes in the faith. Power is viewed as something that increases with an individual's growth in the faith.

Some members feel however, that their greatest manifestations of power occured when they first entered the

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religion, when their zeal and enthusiasm were high. Saints recall that the early days of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name were "Spirit-filled" with many people taking up serpents and working in the other signs. However, other saints consider that much of this activity represented a lack of knowledge rather than a true manifestation of the Spirit.

With regard to the acquisition of power, most saints have their initial experience at the time of their conversions. As all saints were sinners prior to the conversion experience, the power of God is viewed as instrumental in freeing individuals from their lives of sin in the world. The conversion experience can be quite emotional and powerful for saints. During conversion, individuals report that they experienced a variety of previously unfelt sensations, such as visions, unusual auditory phenemonon, loss of contact with the immediate environment, etc.

Many saints recall the conversion experience as being something they did not seek. One Biblical justification for this is found in Acts 9:3-4, which depicts the conversion of Saul (later St. Paul): "And as he (Saul) journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shines round him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul why persecutest me?. . ." (King James Bible). Here, God has chosen a sinner for Himself--a precedent which saints attempt to imitate by actively encouraging the conversion of particular individuals through prayer.

by encouraging the sinner to attend church services, and by providing formal and informal religious instruction, etc.. In these and related ways, saints are instrumental in bringing about the conversion of others. It is probably accurate to assume that in most cases, people who are converted to the faith have had at least minimal contact with others of the religion, or at least, have grown up in a Southern Bible Belt environment where such occurrences were very much a part of the general cultural milieu.

The conversion experience is often initiated when a sinner asks to be prayed for by the saints of the church. The praying for, and "laying on of hands", is believed to release a flow of power over the sinner, resulting in the person's repentance of past sins. The prayed over person sometimes shakes violently waving arms and hands through the air. This type of behavior can be so extreme that saints have to protect the repentant from hitting his head on the mourner's bench, etc.. Other time, this power affects the sinner by causing him/her to pass out from five minutes up to a number of hours. For example, Brother Robert Grooms recalled that (fieldnotes, October 25, 1972): "When he was first converted, he was out of contact with his surroundings from eight p.m. until midnight. He said that you know when it hits. Before that time, he hadn't felt anything of a religious experience." Or, as described by Brother Everett Fraley (in Pelton and Carden 1974:79):

> I repented and prayed for the Holy Ghost one night in church. I got up from the altar and went outside, Something just told me to go back inside and pray again. . . They prayed with me until about 11:00 that night. I was on my knees at the altar praising Jesus when the Holy Ghost moved on me. It felt just like a blanket of electricity covering my body when it started coming in. When it came, it picked me up and laid me flat on my back. It felt just like I was lying on a cloud. First my lips started quivering. It then came into and took control of my tongue. My tongue began to move uncontrollably, and I spoke in other tongues. The electricity stayed with me all this time. I was baptized the very next day.

As noted in the above passage, repenting and praying for the Holy Ghost does not insure that the sinner will receive the asked for conversion experience immediately. Sinners sometimes must do considerable "seeking" before they feel the Holy Ghost.

Repentance and "praying through" do not always take place during church services. It is quite common for sinners to be prayed for in their homes, along roadsides, or on the side of a mountain. This can take place anytime and quite often occurs late at night or in the early hours of the morning. The following account from my fieldnotes (December 1974) illustrates the point:

> My wife and I accompanied Brother Alfred and his family to the home of a family in the church for supper and a social evening. The brother of one of the church members stopped in and teased the saints about their religion, appearing to express little serious interest in it. By the end of the evening he was asking a few serious questions about the church, but still did not appear to be greatly interested in it. However, Brother Alfred received a telephone call at his home at 2 a.m. and was told that the sinner was repenting and wanted Alfred

> to pray through with him. Alfred prayed with the young man for over two hours on a wooded hillside near his home. (The young man was seeking the Holy Ghost.)

The initial conversion experience is only the beginning. The next step is baptism by water and with the spirit. The "Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name, Article of Faith, Book No. 1", (1972) states:

> Article IV, Sec. 1, To be born again of water and spirit is to be baptized in water and with the spirit. St. John 3-5. St. Mark 1-8. Acts 2-38. Acts 10:44-45-46-47-48. . .
>
> Article III, Sec. 4, We believe and teach that the baptism of the Holy Ghost is for all believers. St. John 7:37-38-39. We believe to be filled with the spirit, or to receive the spirit or to be baptized with the spirit, or to be born of the spirit is the same thing. Acts 2-4. Acts 10-47. 1st Cor. 12-13. St. John 3-5.

The baptism of the spirit is seen as a justification or manifestation of the purifying action of water baptism. As expressed by Brother Murl Bass (in Pelton and Carden 1974:77):

> (Murl 'repented' of his sins and 'sought the Holy Ghost'. He was baptized in the water, 'for the remission of sins'. He felt empty.) 'See repentence is empty. That's just empty. Your vessel's (body) empty. The water baptism is to clean it. And the Holy Ghost is to fill it back up, to serve the purpose'.

But, as seen by Brother Everett Fraley, one can receive the "Spirit of God" before, during, or after water baptism (ibid.):

> 'The Bible says, 'Without being born again into the water and the spirit, no man shall enter into the Kingdom of God.' The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of God. Some people get the Holy Ghost before they're baptized--some after . . . I believe it's a witness when you speak in tongues that you've got the Holy Ghost. This is the Lord's way of showing you you've

> got it. I believe you've got to have something there to quicken (jerk) the mortal body.'

Although a person receives the spirit, this does not imply that he/she can automatically work in the signs, the Spiritual Gifts, preach, or handle fire. To obtain power for such works a saint must be prepared to fast and pray, study the Word, remain separated from the world--i.e., to pay the price. Faith is necessary for working with and acquiring power.

Saints express the belief that if one wants power he must seek it, and participate in church services (come to the front of the church and not stay in the back) (fieldnotes, July 26, 1972): "Brother Ed mentioned that if one wanted powers, he did not stay in the back of the church. Liston then mentioned that he came up to the altar daily to gain power". Others in the church have stated that they can feel the power as they enter the hollow or cove in which the church is located. Brother Walter Newcomb reported that (fieldnotes October 1972):

> He was in the harbor at Nagasaki before it was bombed. The bomb melted steel reinforced buildings. When the bombs come, he wanted to be up at the church, protected by the Word. The church is like Jerusalem, a protected place.

So, in this respect, the acquisition of power has a spatial dimension as power is attributed (albeit loosely) to specific places.

Finally, as conceptualized by serpent-handlers, acquisition of anointing power (Holy Ghost) can be hindered by misuse or disuse. When a saint receives the anointing, it is considered necessary that he act in the appropriate sign or gift lest the anointing not be given again. A sister in the church who handled serpents in the past lamented that (fieldnotes, October 23, 1972):

> She became scared when people got serpent-bit and she did not act on the anointing to take up serpents and consequently lost it. She would like it back, as it is the best feeling in the world to have the anointing. . .

Ideally, if the above conditions obtain, it is considered that saints (brothers and sisters) can expect to acquire the anointing to work in particular signs. Similarly, depending upon interpretation, children as young as six or seven years have received the anointing to take up serpents, or have manifested power affected behaviors such as shouting, speaking in tongues, jerking, etc.. Figure II summarizes the ideal features necessary for the acquisition of power to facilitate various performances. In interpreting the relationships of these features it is evident that this is a highly bounded set of necessary conditions. At an abstract or ideal level, at least, this domain is relatively unambiguous and clear cut. If the requisite features are present the saint should have a high expectation that God will provide power to perform certain tasks such as taking up serpents, preaching, speaking in tongues, or, for general use in everyday life. Indeed, saints' expectations often are borne out and power is utilized in a variety of ways without apparent

FIGURE II

IDEAL FEATURES FOR THE ACQUISITION OF ANOINTING POWER

Faith	Repent	Baptism Rebirth	Holy Living	Prayer Fasting	Effective Action	Age		Sex		Place of Power
						Adult	Child	Male	Female	
+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+/-	+	+	+/-

difficulty. This is important in the creation of a distinctive group identity as well as the individual identities of various saints who "successfully" employ supernatural power. In numerous other cases, however, the workings of power prove problematic: the sick are not healed, demons are not put to route, and preaching lacks Divine inspiration. All such negations of ideal claims must be considered in looking at the creation of a sense of community and distinctive identity as saints. Saints' management of identity under a variety of circumstances then becomes a crucial issue. Before returning to the problem of social management of supernatural power, saints' uses of power will be considered.

THE USE OF POWER

In looking at saints' uses of power, two topics will be examined: (1) working in the signs; and, (2) power and everyday life. These topics will be developed through selected examples and cases.

Working In The Signs--To outsiders, one of the most spectacular and dramatic features of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name is working in the signs. For saints, anointing to work in the signs constitutes one of the most important administrations of power. Mark 16:15-18 of the King James Bible provides the basis of working in the signs:

> And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he

> that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

Serpent-handlers generally agree that "the five signs follow" true believers as irrefutable demonstrations to sinners of the "reality" of God's power as manifested through His modern day saints. Only a church "with signs following", they reason, can convincingly validate its claims to holiness and Apostolic descendancy. However, it is not expected that all members will work in the signs or that signs are an essential part of every church service. Indeed, members are quick to point out that the signs have been overemphasized by the media and even by some of the faithful. The point that members make is that in the total ministry of the church the signs are but one of many means of bringing souls to God. The five signs will now be looked at with respect to their basic conceptual and performance features.

(1) "They Shall Take Up Serpents"--Of the five signs, taking up serpents has received a disproportionate amount of attention both in the scientific literature and in the popular press. Specifically, (as mentioned throughout this study) serpent-handling occupies but a small part of most church services and does not occur at all in many others. Furthermore, in most serpent-handling congregations, only a

handful of the members actually engage in the practice. This is not to suggest that serpent-handling is not an important feature of the religion, only that it must be viewed as part of a larger belief and activity system.

Serpent-handling is probably the most effective means of attracting sinners to the church. As many people are afraid of poisonous snakes (rattlesnakes and copperheads), it can be quite spectacular, dramatic, and frightening to see them handled. This is heightened by preachers' admonitions that "you really need the anointing before going into the serpent box, because death is in that box" (fieldnotes, November 11, 1972).

As seen by those who take up serpents, once the sinner comes to church to watch serpent-handling, he then has the opportunity to hear the Word of God and to learn what is necessary for salvation. This seems to be an effective strategy as many saints remember being converted in this way.

Serpent-handling depends on the availability of serpents. This happens a number of ways. Serpent-handling churches ordinarily do not own the snakes that are used during religious services; individual members own and bring their own serpents to church. Or, visiting preachers often bring serpents with them to church. Occasionally, sinners bring a freshly caught rattlesnake or copperhead to religious services to see whether or not the saints will handle a snake that has not been kept in captivity. Availability does not insure that they will be handled. If no one receives the proper anointing serpents will not be handled unless "God tells" a saint to handle serpents "on faith" or under some other administration of power.

As serpent-handling is conceived of as a sign to believers, there should be no need for serpents to be taken up when sinners are not present. Many saints would concur with this view. Although for others, serpent-handling appears to serve as an affirmation of belief and as a pleasurable rite of group solidarity. This negotiable feature of group etiquette can generate considerable conflict in the church. Some individuals assert that when they receive the anointing to take up serpents they will follow the spirit regardless of who is present. It is difficult to effectively challenge individuals who rely on spirit possession to justify their behavior.

Conversely, that serpents are sometimes not handled when both serpents and sinners are present, may also be interpreted as a demonstration to non believers. Brother Alfred reported, for example, that (tape transcription, August 20, 1972):

> Amen, somebody asked me the other day, said, I, I thought you people just worshipped them snakes. Amen, now they really believed that; that was what they really believed. They wasn't just talkin', they really thought that. Amen, they thought we come out here and set these boxes up front and just worshipped them. Amen, but we had them in church here last night, amen: I think they seen the difference when they didn't even get took up, amen, in the whole service. I think they learned a little different. All right. . .

Serpent-handling performances vary considerably with respect to when they occur during a service, duration, what is done with the serpents, etc.. It is difficult to describe the average or typical episode of serpent-handling. However, a number of generalizations can be made. Usually, during larger weekend services when visitors (sinners) are present, a certain amount of advance notice is given to the fact that serpents might be handled. One becomes quite aware of this when serpent-boxes are carried to the front of the church and placed under or on the mourners bench. Brothers congregate around the serpent-boxes and peer into them, informally discussing particular snakes. The leader of a service emphasizes that serpents are present and will be taken up if someone receives the anointing. The following excerpt from a church service is illustrative (Brother Alfred, tape-recorded August 20, 1972):

> So we want you folks, all of you that sing come right on and sing your song and obey God and, like we said before, we got, looks like maybe eight, about eight serpents here. I think four rattlers and four copperheads, maybe. If you want one just come on and get it. Don't wait on somebody else to move, and you be sure you're anointed when you go in the box. Be sure you're anointed and then keep your anointing to yourself. Don't be, amen, trying to put it on somebody else because I don't believe you'll do that. But, amen, I've learned in my, in services where I've got anything to do with, or not my services, but I like to , amen, counsel the people on this because they's been so many things said about this part of the Word that are not so and told about how we carry this out, that's not so. . .

Brother Alfred not only establishes that serpents are present and might be handled, but also provides minimal ground rules for their handling. Namely, serpents are: (1) only to be handled when the anointing is present; and, (2) not to be handled to people who do not seek them or who do not have the anointing. In emphasizing these basic rules of procedure saints usually admonish that ". . . everything here is done with decency and in order". Brother Alfred also instructed saints not to wait on somebody else to move. This is to encourage saints to overcome hesitancy or reluctance to act when they feel the anointing to take up serpents.

The following description from my fieldnotes provides an idea of what takes place during actual serpent-handling performances (November 5, 1972):

> Tonight, the duration and intensity of serpent-handling was as great as I have seen it since Jimmy Williams initiated the first round of serpent-handling. Al Ball took the rattlesnake from Jimmy. He handled it at least twice as it was passed back and forth (mostly between he and Jimmy). The first round of serpent-handling was brief, lasting only a number of minutes.
>
> During the second round, Jimmy Williams, Al Ball, Eunice Ball, Bea Eslinger, Liston Pack, Bill Forrester, Johnny Greer, and Lester Ball handled serpents. The serpent was passed primarily between Jimmy and Alfred (who was playing the guitar). Jimmy Williams preached a bit as he strutted with the serpent in his hand. He said, 'They shall take up serpents'. He looked toward the congregation and held the serpent up into the air. He spoke in tongues and jumped about on the platform. . . Sister Bea did not hold the serpent very long. Her hands seemed to be trembling: Jimmy took the serpent from her after a very short time. Al Ball allowed the serpent to stretch out on his arm and he put it near his face.

> During the serpent-handling, Brother Walter stood in front of the performers with his arms outstretched and his hands held up, as if to share his power with them or as a way of being a part of the performance. Also, during the serpent-handling Sister Lola started crying. During this round of serpent-handling a prolonged (repeated) version of 'When the Saints Go Marching In' was sung. Songs were merged quickly, one into the other so as to keep continuous music and singing going. During this round of serpent-handling, the congregation tended to be in the aisle. There was considerable hand-clapping, spontaneous glossolalia, dancing in the spirit, shouting, jumping up and down, screaming, etc. An elderly, white-haired sister was dancing about as were numerous other people. The feeling of group participation seemed to be high, as if each individual's enthusiasm and participation was important to the success of those handling the serpents.
>
> After the serpent-handling, Brother Liston placed the serpent box on the pulpit with the screen facing the congregation. Liston peered in at the snake. After a short while, Brother Ed removed the box and placed it under the bench in the amen corner.

As noted in the above account, serpent-handling can take place more than once during a church service. Usually, between the various episodes of serpent-handling, which can last from one minute to an hour or more, singing, preaching, praying for the sick, testifying, etc., takes place.

Saints profess to follow the Word quite literally and emphasize that "serpents" (not snakes) are "taken up" (not handled). Serpents are occasionally placed on the pulpit and allowed to crawl over the open Bible. Anointed saints take them up from the pulpit, thereby following the literal wording of the Scripture.

Within these basic guidelines, there are a variety of ways to handle serpents. Some saints hold the snake for only a minute or so before passing it on to someone else. Others keep the snakes for much longer, allowing them to crawl through their hands, up their arms, or around their necks. Some handlers drape the serpents over their heads or drag the snake across their faces. Other handlers swing or whirl the snakes through the air.[2] Serpent-handlers sometimes take up a mass of entwined serpents. In the past, some in the church placed serpents on the floor and "treaded" on them (consistent with Luke 10:19: Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions").[3]

Serpent-handling comes to a halt when all the anointed people have finished with the snakes and placed them back in the boxes. As serpents are privately owned, some care is taken to insure that they are placed in the proper boxes.[4] Then the boxes are customarily placed behind the pulpit, in the amen corner, or under a bench on the platform. This is done to encourage those who want to pray or be prayed for, but who might be reticent in the proximity of a serpent box:

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[2] This is not a common practice at The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name, as the mortality rate for snakes is quite high when handled in this manner. Saints at the church take pride in the fact that they do not lose many serpents as a result of broken necks due to careless handling.

[3] On rare occasion in the past, locally caught scorpions were also treaded on.

[4] I have heard of saints who paint part of their serpent so as to identify it. Other saints maintain that the anointing will insure that the serpents are returned to the appropriate boxes. This usually proves problematic only at large, special services when saints from a number of states have gathered and a dozen or more serpents are handled simultaneously.

> Before altar call time, Jimmy moved the serpent box to the back of the amen corener. He made an announcement that people need not hesitate to pray because of the serpent box, as it has been moved and there is no danger. . . (fieldnotes, July 6, 1972).

Often, moving of the serpent box signals the end of serpent-handling for the remainder of the service, as few people initiate serpent-handling once the boxes have been removed and padlocked.

Although serpent-handling often takes place as described above in a context of spirited singing, hand clapping, dancing in the spirit, etc., it can also take place under very different circumstances. Serpents are handled without music when people are calmly sitting in their seats, or even during preaching. The following case from my fieldnotes is illustrative (July 21, 1973):

> During Al's preaching he talked about the anointing to take up serpents. While he was speaking, he reached into the serpent box and took up a large Western Diamondback. After the services, he explained that the Lord had a purpose for doing this--to show people that snake-handlers don't have to be in a frenzy or a trance or something to take up serpents.

Serpents are sometimes taken up after the formal church service has ended. For example (fieldnotes, November 16, 1972):

> Just after the service ended, I went up front to talk to Brother Johnny. I looked into Jimmy's serpent box at the 'singing' snakes (shaking rattles) and commented to him that they sure were lively ones. I asked him what caused them to rattle and he said that he thought it was because they were nervous. He then placed the box on the pulpit and opened the lid. The two large rattlesnakes

> crawled out and he took them up while saying in tongues, 'Iliamamamama'. . . The snakes held themselves straight out and tried crawling away from him. As Jimmy handled the serpents, Liston stood up on the bench and the people (Johnny and others) who were leaving the church, stopped and faced Jimmy (as if they were all in silent prayer for him.) Jimmy then tried placing the serpents back into the box, but the snakes resisted and tried crawling back out. During this whole time, Liston was praying aloud and saying things like, 'stay down Satan, oh, Satan, get in there. . .' The serpents were placed in the box and we all left the church house. Jimmy's young son carried the serpent box to their car. . .

Although I inadvertantly seemed to initiate this performance, serpent-handling as described above, is not a rare occurrence.

Serpent-handling is not restricted to church services. In fact, much of the serpent-handling done by members of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name takes place in saints' homes, along roadsides, in the woods, at sinners homes, etc.. Three such situations can be identified: (A) when snakes are provided by sinners; (B) during serpent exchange; and, (C) by saints for personal purposes.

A. Snakes Provided By Sinners--As stated before, serpent-handling is important to the church's mission of bringing souls to salvation, in part by attracting sinners to the church. This is not restricted to formal occasions. Sinners sometimes bring snakes to saints' homes to see them handled. Such impromptu performances can be quite convincing to the sinner as the possibility of "doctored" snakes being used is eliminated. Also, this type of social interaction between sinner and saint provides the saint with additional expressive contexts in which to validate his status as saint:

> Buford spent considerable time testifying about a serpent he had handled last evening. Just as he was going to bed, three sinner boys knocked on his door. . . They had a rattlesnake for him. Buford became scared as he did not have the anointing. The snake was in the trunk of their car, in a snare. Buford grabbed it behind the neck and turned it loose. He started to feel something and went after it and took it up. He felt the anointing. The next day, the same guys showed up with two copperheads that had never been handled (except with the snare). . . (fieldnotes August 16, 1972).

Brother Liston testified (tape transcription of church service, August 20, 1972) regarding serpent-handling outside of church:

> There's some people brought me an old big rattler, amen. . . There was nine people present. Lots of them, amen, was in the church here today saw hit and they. . . H'aint nobody didn't handle hit because hit was meaner than the rest of 'em. Amen, now listen, under the anointing power of God, amen, there ain't no mean ones, amen. . . All, everything comes subject to the anointing of God. Amen, had a big old gallon milk jug with a great old big mouth on it, and had it (snake) down in there. . . 'Now let's see you handle this' and I told them, I says, boys, I couldn't handle that at 'all, unless the anointing of God was on me. Amen, when I began to meditate to the Father, thank God, amen, I just, and the Devil told me, now the devil can talk to you a little bit. He said, 'when you get it up, how you gonna put it back in?' E sha ma ma ma ma hi. . . Thank God, amen, it don't matter after God told me to get it up how I'll get him back in. . . The Devil said, 'now what are you going to do?' There come a man with a big old paste board box, and I just dropped him after God gave victory and then I handled him like a rope. Good anointing of God. God, that wasn't me, Brother Ben, that was the anointing of God. I asked the boys, I said, boys, you sure you never pulled his teeth or done anything to him? They said 'we know and are fully convinced there's nothing done to him', amen. Amen, in the

> bars and half of Newport done heard about that. Amen, now that wasn't me, that was the anointing of God. . .

The above examples show how serpent-handling is used as a convincing demonstration of God's power outside of formal services. In Liston's testimony, he emphasized how his "victory" over the serpent was talked about in the bars and all over Newport. He was careful to emphasize that personal power was not involved, but rather, the anointing of God.

An interesting outcome of serpent-handling at the homes of saints (where sinners supply the serpents) is that new, "wild" serpents become available for use in the church. This is an important consideration as many saints prefer to handle newly acquired serpents.

B. Serpent Exchange--When saints of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name visit other serpent-handling churches, they often carry serpents with them to exchange for a larger or a different variety of snake. As already suggested, a positive value is placed on serpents that have not been taken up previously, or have not been taken up at a particular church. Members of the Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name like to acquire the large Black Rattlesnakes that are more abundant in the Kentucky Mountains or, the Western Diamondback Rattlesnakes that are available through snake shows, or through congregations in Alabama or Georgia. Through serpent-exchanges, many of the snakes originally provided by sinners find their way into an intricate exchange network that potentially ranges from northern Florida to Detroit. (See Birckhead 1975 for a further discussion of serpent exchange.) The following description of an exchange is illustrative (fieldnotes, November 26, 1972, Middlesboro, Ky. and Harrogate, Tenn.):

> Ben Laws, his mother, his wife, and a couple of kids were just leaving the church house in Middlesboro when we arrived (Liston, Jimmy, and I) . . . Jimmy asked Ben if he had the serpents that he had promised him. Ben said, come up to the church house. . . Ben showed Jimmy the serpents and asked him how many that he wanted. Jimmy explained that we had just been up to London at a service and that he had given a rattlesnake to a brother from Blackmont, Ky. Jimmy said that he wanted two serpents. Ben said, 'pick y ou out one'. He asked Jimmy if he wanted the one back that Jimmy had given him awhile back. Jimmy said, 'no' (like of course not). He wanted the one that he had never handled before and that had been handled by only a couple of saints. Jimmy then directed me to go to his car and get the cedar serpent box. . . A women sitting in Ben's truck (his sister-in-law) asked me if they were going to handle snakes up there. I said no, they were just swapping serpents. She seemed excited and walked up the hill with me to the church house. When we entered the front door we saw a serpent crawling on the floor and Brother Ben had another one in his hands. The woman who accompanied me took the serpent up from the floor. Ben handed the serpent to Jimmy. Jimmy handled it and gave it back to Ben. Ben offered it to me by making a gesture of reaching it out. I did not reach for it so he handed it to Liston. After a few minutes of passing the serpents around, Jimmy put his newly acquired rattlesnake into the cedar serpent box. . . A couple of minutes later, the other serpent was placed into Ben's serpent box. . .

After leaving the church, we drove to Ben's home near Harrogate, Tennessee to pick up a large, Black Rattlesnake. Once there, another round of serpent-handling ensued, and Brother Jimmy acquired an additional snake.

In the above case, Jimmy did not exchange serpents with Ben in a literal sense. Jimmy had given a rattlesnake to a preacher in London, Kentucky earlier in the day. As described in my fieldnotes (November 26, 1972):

> After church (London), the old pastor from Blackmont asked Jimmy for one of his rattlesnakes. Jimmy gave it to him and said that you should always give a brother a serpent when he asks for it. . .

On the whole, serpent-exchange is quite informal and is not based on a strict, balanced reciprocity. Rather, through this exchange, generalized patterns of interaction and reciprocity are set up between churches and between serpent-owning brothers within a church. In the first case cited above, for example, Jimmy had supplied Ben with serpents in the past. Similarly, the next time that Jimmy would have visited at Blackmont, Kentucky, he could ask and be assured of receiving a snake from the pastor of that church.

With regard to rules of serpent-handling, the above case provides a dramatic example of when serpent-handling is not practiced as a sign, or demonstration for sinners, but rather as a ritual of exchange and solidarity among true believers. This type of serpent-handling occurs quite frequently and has, for the most part, been totally neglected in the literature.

C. By Saints For Personal Purposes--Finally saints engage in serpent-handling when collecting snakes in the woods or when transferring snakes from one box to another.

Serpent-handling sometimes takes place when a saint encounters a snake crossing the highway. This is how some in the church first took up serpents:

> Junior testified about how he had wanted victory over the serpent and had never received it. But he prayed on the matter and the other day while he was driving down the road in his truck, a serpent crawled across the road. He stopped the truck and got the victory. . . (fieldnotes November 1, 1972)

From fieldnotes (July 28, 1971): "Jimmy and others handle the snakes outside of church when they feel the power. One brother was bitten yesterday while feeding a snake". Or, (August 11, 1973):

> Al was in the process of transferring a large rattlesnake from the large snake drawer to the small box that he carries to church, when the snake got loose. Alfred did not have the anointing so he jumped on the dresser. He appeared very frightened. Brother Clyde did not seem to be afraid and he took up the unruly snake and tried putting it into the serpent box. The snake resisted and tried crawling onto the bed where I was sitting. . . Fortunately, Clyde succeeded in capturing the snake. . .

In none of the above cases were serpents taken up as a sign to unblievers. In the first example, the saint handled the snake in private. This might have served to confirm the Word for him personally, and to provide him with material for a testimony. In the other cases, the handling of serpents was primarily for pragmatic reasons.

Two considerations that have been glossed over or neglected in this discussion of serpent-handling, are the variables of sex and age. While ideally serpent-handling is open to anyone with anointing, sex and age are limiting factors.

Most serpent-handling at The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name is done by men. Serpents are handled by women in the church, but serpent-handling is always initiated by brothers. The care and keeping of serpents is considered a male task. Serpent-boxes are carried to and from church by men. Also, women are not involved in the collection, purchase, exchange, or ownership of serpents. Consequently, women have no part in the recounting of serpent lore regarding the acquisition, keeping, and exchange of serpents.

At The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name it is believed that a person will not be given the anointing to take up serpents until he reaches such an age that he is capable of understanding the demands of a "Christian life". Males in the church as young as fourteen or fifteen have handled the serpents on occasion. To date, I have not seen females of this age handle the serpents. In a couple of cases in another church, a seven year old boy allegedly handled serpents. According to Brother Alfred, the seven year old was handed the serpent by his father. Most of the people at the church do not believe that a child of that age should be allowed to take up serpents. Brother Alfred reflects the opinion of the majority of members concerning this (transcript, December 17, 1974):

> RJB: Is there any particular age at which a person can work a particular sign?
>
> Alfred: No it doesn't, a, age in years, doesn't have anything to do with the working of God. The only age

> requirement would be that a person be old enough to know right and wrong and to realize that there're a sinner and they need to repent and turn their heart to God and live for God, then there're old enough, if God sees fit to place a sing or gift in their life, then their old enough to operate it. Of course, we don't allow the children who are too young to understand or a person maybe, who would be mentally retarded or something of that sort. We watch after these people, don't allow them to get involved or to get where they could get hurt. . .

In a casual conversation with Brother Alfred, he stated that even if he felt that a child had the anoiting to take up serpents, he would not allow it to happen. Such an act, he reasoned, could have considerable legal and social repercussions if the child suffered injury or death from snakebite. This provides an excellent example of serpent-handlers' pragmatism in applying of the spirit to carnal realms, and affirms the rule that "everything be done with decency and in order".

D. "And if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them"--Unlike serpent-handling, poison drinking is practiced infrequently at The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name. In over twleve months at the church I witnessed only two episodes. In both cases, Jimmy Williams consumed carbon-tetrachloride.[5] At some other serpent-handling congregations strychnine is more frequently consumed. This is not to suggest that poison is routinely consumed by whole congregations, but rather that a number of individuals in the church consistently receive this anointing. Thus, saints report on this or that brother or sister who has consumed strychnine one hundred time or more--"Who drink strychnine by the gallon".

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[5] As mentioned in a number of places in this study, Jimmy Williams and Buford Pack died from doses of strychnine (April 7, 1973). For a long time following their deaths, poison was not consumed at the church. However, in the past year or so, saints have related to me that Brother Clude Ricker has consumed large amounts of strychnine.

In many respects poison drinking is not as dramatic as serpent-handling. Part of this may be attributed to the fact that there is no potential danger for the onlooker. In the two cases of poison drinking that I observed, considerable advance testimony, preaching, and conversation preceeded the performances, taking more time than the act itself. Jimmy first consumed poison, for example, on the evening of Saturday, July 29, 1972. As early as July 6 of that year, he talked about "drinking deadly poison". The following excerpts from my field notes demonstrate this (July 6, 1972):

> Jimmy Williams spoke (during a church service) about drinking strychnine. He said that he felt that he had that anointing. He tried buying some, but it was in tablet form. The other drug store said that they would not sell it to him without a prescription. He said that Brother Liston told him that he would get some strychnine for him tomorrow night and that he (Jimmy) would drink it. He might die, but he was sure that he was going to a better country. Williams then asked how many have seen the drinking of poison. No one raised their hands. He then mentioned that cyanide can also be used.

The next evening, July 7, 1972, Jimmy:

> . . . testified briefly and said that he had hoped to find a vial of strychnine sitting on the pulpit. But, it was not there. He emphasized working in the various signs and emphasized his prowess at handling serpents. . .

Then on Saturday, July 8, 1972, Brother Liston told the congregation that:

> He bought some strychnine and that it costs $20.00 an ounce. If many of the brothers and sisters in the church took to drinking it, the church would not have money enough to keep them supplied. Liston said that he would not buy it for someone else as he wanted to pray, fast, and think about the anointing for awhile. . . He is thinking the sign of drinking deadly things through very carefully as one must have good anointing to drink strychnine, as one drop on a straw can kill a man. (Liston seems to have checked into this quite carefully.)

Then at a tent revival in Brevard, North Carolina (Friday, July 28, 1972):

> Jimmy Williams was asked to sing, but said that he was not in the mood. He testified briefly. He said that a couple of days ago he went to the drugstore and bought some poison--deadly poison, just a little bit will kill you if you don't have the anointing. Even breathing the poison can be fatal. It says so right on the label. But, he forgot to bring it with him. Maybe there was a reason that he forgot it, as maybe he wasn't anointed to drink deadly poison that night. . .

The following evening at The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name, Jimmy consumed carbontetrachloride. As described in my fieldnotes (July 29, 1972):

> . . .A glass of water and a bottle of carbontetrachloride were on the pulpit. At 8:10 p.m. after an extremely intense episode of serpent-handling (Jimmy handled two copperheads), Jimmy poured some poison into the glass of water and then drank about half of it.
>
> After drinking the poison (and until the end of the service), Jimmy seemed to be perspiring excessively and appeared red in the face. . . A piece of tissue paper was placed over the top of the glass that contained the mixture of poison and water that Jimmy did not completely drink.

After the above incident, I have no further reference to poison drinking in my fieldnotes until Saturday, August 12, 1972. During this service, Liston made a passing reference to his brother, Buford, who had consumed battery acid in North Carolina:

> . . .with the anointing a man can do almost anything. Brother Buford drank a quart of battery acid that some nonbelievers brought to Brevard last week. It did not hurt him at all. If he didn't have the anointing, it would have eaten away his tongue and all of his insides. . .

On Saturday, August 19, 1972, Buford testified about the anointing that he had received for drinking the battery acid. He emphasized that he was not bragging, just giving credit to the Lord.

Jimmy Williams also consumed poison on Saturday, November 18, 1972. This time some advance publicity preceeded the event. On Wednesday, November 15, 1972 Jimmy announced that: ". . . he would bring his serpents to church and he would also have some deadly poison . . . so that if anyone got the anointing, they could obey the Lord" (fieldnotes).

On Saturday, November 18, 1972, Professor Thomas Burton (English/Folklore, East Tennessee State University) and a film crew attended the church to make a documentary film on the church ("They Shall Take Up Serpents"). The bottle of carbontetrachloride and a glass of water were displayed conspicuously on the pulpit. As before, Jimmy took up serpents and then poured the poison into the glass of water and drank it. While he was doing this, Brother Billy Jay Forrester was bitten by a rattlesnake. Jimmy's performance was eclipsed by Billy Jay's serpent-bite and by the confusion caused by the presence of the film crew.[6]

In some respects the drinking of poisons is a source of controversy in the church. Some saints argue that the Biblical passage, Mark 16:18--"and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them"--applies only to cases in which "God's children" are given poisons by an enemy (unknowingly). Those with this belief emphasize the conditional nature of the passage. This contrasts with "they shall" (take up serpents). Brother Everett Fraley states that (in Pelton and Carden 1974:107):

> It says 'if'. 'Shall' and 'if' are a lot different, I think. It says you shall take up serpents and you shall lay hands on the sick. It says if you drink any deadly thing. . . I don't think it's a command when it says 'if'. I believe if you happen to drink something accidently that's poison, it wouldn' hurt you. I believe the Lord would let you survive it. But I don't think you should go out and get a bottle of strychnine and turn it up and drink it. The Bible don't say you shall.

Members emphasize that a strong anointing is necessary. Brother Robert Fraley states (Ibid.):

> I believe to drink strychnine at a church service you have to be anointed to drink it, with a lot stronger anointing than usual. . . I saw one man drink it who said he knew that he was doing, but he couldn't have stopped himself if he'd wanted to. He didn't feel any ill effects from it. Nothing.

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[6] After the service I was at the front of the church talking to saints when Brother Rubel pointed out to me and the others standing there, that the poison (fieldnotes)

> ". . .had eaten a hole in the plastic glass. I examined the glass with the hole in it. . . Brother Ralph started to smell the poison that was left in the bottle but Sister Loal told him that he better not as it warned against it on the label. . ."

E. "They Shall speak with new tongues"--Glossalalia per se is not the focus of this section as considerable research has been carried out on this phenomenon (see, Abel 1974; Goodman 1969, 1971, 1972; Hine 1969; Jacquith 1967; May 1956; Samarin 1968, 1969, 1972; Ranaghan 1972; and, many others). Rather, I am concerned with how members utilize and manage glossolalia in various settings.

I take glossolalia to be (Samarin 1972):

> A vocal act believed by the speaker to be language and showing rudimentary language-like structure but no consistent word-meaning correspondences recognizable by either speaker or hearers; (in Christianity, speech attributed to the Holy Spirit in languages unknown to the speaker and incomprehensible without divinely inspired interpretation. . .)

Glossolalia can be distinguished from "Xenoglossia" (Samarin 1968:52) which literally, "foreign tongue" (Goodman 1972:149). Many Pentecostals, including serpent-handlers, report on cases in which a member of a congregation was speaking in tongues and a foreign visitor recognized the utterance as being Greek, Yoruba, Japanese, etc.; but substantiated occurrences are relatively rare. At The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name, one member claims to speak tongues in Korean. He spent time in Korea during the Korean War and his tongue speaking is distinguishable from other members of the church. How much credence members give to his claims is questionable.

Glossolalia can be distinguished from natural language because it has no true semantic structure. Glossolalic utterances do not correspond to replicable units of meaning.

This is not to suggest, as do some uninformed critics of Pentecostalism, that glossolalia is meaningless gibberish. Glossolalic utterances do possess a phonological structure. Samarin (op. cit., p. 60) states further that: "The principal linguistic feature which distinguishes them (glossolalic utterances) from gibberish is the remarkable number of phonological units at various levels". Or: "In other words, glossic syllables are not simply spewed out in a haphazard sort of way; there is in each glossa a kind of microsegmental syntax similar to that of natural languages".

The performance of glossolalia in a religious community, may be viewed as a total speech event in which meaning derives from the totality rather than from discrete parts of the utterance. The meaning of particular utterances is usually at a symbolic rather than a literal level and must be analyzed as situated in particular types of social settings in which background knowledge is partially or totally shared by members. Although glossolalic utterances may not have semantic meaning, they do convey various social meanings. It is in these social meanings and their management that this discussion addresses itself.

In the church, speaking in tongues can take place during any part of the service and in virtually any context outside of the formal service. Many utterances are short and repetitious or what Abel (1974:297) labels "stylized tongues". During an emotional part of the service two brothers might shake hands and hug one another and produce a short utterance such as "iliamamamama, illiamamamamama, illiamahisign. . ." This particular sound pattern is heard frequently in the church.

Saints frequently disagree over the meaning and significance of speaking in tongues in the religious community. The problem arises in part because speaking in tongues (like most aspects of the religion) is sanctioned in the Scripture in more than one place and represents different "administrations of power". Consequently, it is governed by slightly different rules of applicability depending on the particular administration that is operative.

With respect to members' assignment of meaning to particular utterances, four distinctions can be made. Depending on the situation, saints seek to know if a glossolalic utterance is in fact the "unknown tongue", "new tongues", "other tongues", or "divers kinds of tongues". These distinctions are established in various passages of Scripture and are considered by saints to represent different modalities of speaking in tongues. Thus, for example, in Mark 16:17, it states: ". . . they shall speak with new tongues". However, on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:4 reported that the Apostles: ". . . began to speak with other tongues" (some saints call this "other language tongues." I Corinthians 12:10 states that: ". . . to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues". In I Corinthians 14:1-5, a number of references are made to "an unknown tongue".

The following passages in I Corinthians 14:1-5 places additional qualifications of speaking in tongues:

> Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no men understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied; for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.

Members cite this text to insure that speaking in tongues is not overemphasized, as the passage clearly states that prophecy is a higher function. The passage also instructs members that the interpretation of tongues is important. In effect, this passage promotes the social functions of speaking in tongues over the individualistic and purely experiential dimension of glossolalia.

At The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name, however, a number of Biblical ideals are routinely ignored. Unlike some serpent-handling congregations, prophecy is not emphasized,[7] nor is the interpretation of tongues. Many tongue speakers at the church seldom preach or testify, ostensibly violating the premise that (I Corinthians 14:19):

> I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with

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[7] Some more established "Trinitarian" congregations, for example, have a role category of "prophetess. (Elifson/Tripp personal conversation, April 2, 1976).

> understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, that ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. . .

In addition, saints consistently ignore the injunction that (I Corinthains 14:27): "If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and then by course; and let one interpret. . ."

Brother Alfred, for one, is extremely critical of the way that glossolalia is used in the church (transcription of interview, December 1974):

> . . . I guess I disagree with the church, most of the churches on this particular thing (tongues). The Bible does teach that if they speak in tongues, if a man speaks in the unknown tongue let him interpret and if there be no interpretor let him keep silent in the church. In the church unless a person is praying, or rejoicing, or praising God, whichever word you care to use, they shouldn't speak in tongues unless there is an interpretor, unless they interpret it. . . Just standing before a congregation of people and speaking in a tongue, whether it be other tongues or unknown tongue, there's no edification in it. Nobody is edifyed, other than the person doing it.

In the interview, I then mentioned to Alfred that "some people speak in tongues at almost every service. . ." He replied that:

> . . . I'm awfully afraid that about a good 70 or 80% of the tongues that's spoken in the churches is not inspired of the spirit of God. It's just simply either someone who is within their own flesh, within themselves, speaking just for their own edification, because they can or someone maybe who is possessed of a devil spirit. And then of course, there are the real tongues and they are right and it does happen in the church, and because people fake and because there's a lot of fake in it, does not take away from the fact that there is the real thing. You can't really put a label on it because you could run into a situation of maybe saying someone who was really in the spirit of

> God, wasn't. 'Course, I can tell; but, then on the other hand there are a lot of other people who don't, are apparently unable to make the distinction between the two and, then it could be that its the real Holy Ghost talking and somebody else has had the interpretation, just failed to give it. This is a possibility and I believe, I truly believe that that happens many a time when someone had the interpretation, should have given it and didn't, and the person who was speaking was actually speaking in the spirit of God.

A central dilemma in managing power effected behaviors is distinguishing the "real" from the "fake"--i.e., the appropriate from the inappropriate. This is a sensitive issue as the danger exists that in labelling behavior one ". . . could run into a situation of maybe saying someone who was really in the spirit of God, wasn't". Tonges, like all other expressions of supernatural power in saints' lives presents complex problems of negotiating meaning in ongoing situations. In distinguishing the appropriate from the inappropriate saints rely on the commonly shared rule that: "God's spirit will always follow His Word". Members have little difficulty in accepting this basic premise of the religion. The application of the rule to particular situations can be problematic, resulting in part from the wide range of interpretations regarding the meaning of the Word. The question can be raised: whose version of the meaning of the Biblical Word does God's spirit follow? This is no easy matter to arbitrate in a group where all members are legitimate interpretors of the Word, as well as legitimate recipients of supernatural power.

F. "In my name shall they cast out devils"--Casting out demons is related to healing the sick, as illness is seen often as resulting from demon possession. Saints reason that if the demon is expelled healing will take place. For the most part, this is a simple and straightforward operation. The afflicted person approaches the front of the church and is prayed for by the brothers and sisters (in some cases) who "lay hands" on his/her head. While doing this, saints pray intensely and emotionally, often shouting out at the alleged demon saying things such as: "in the name of Jesus begone". Although saints report on cases where the possessed person assumed other personalities, fought the exorcists, projected strange voices, or exuded blood from their mouths, this is relatively rare and casting out demons is usually not this dramatic. Specifically, most exorcism occurs in the course of "Divine healing" of the sick. The sign of casting out demons lends emphasis to the point that, although all five signs are practiced in the church, some are deemed more useful or desirable than are others. This varies from congregation to congregation as well as within congregations from one time period to another. For a number of weeks in the spring of 1972, members at The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name devoted considerable time during church services to casting out demons. This emphasis was abandoned after the unsuccessful attempts to cast demonds from a mentally retarded girl.

G. "They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover"--Divine healing" (sometimes called faith healing) is governed by at least five separate administrations of power. The "sign" of healing as specified in Mark 16:18 is one of the five. Healing under this administration can be effected by any brother or sister who has the requisite anointing. Healing is also handled by the "elders" of the church (James 5:14). This category is more specialized than the preceeding one as only "elders" are eligible. As "elders" are by definition males, this administration is both sex and role specific. Most of the attempts at healing in the church are conducted under the above administrations.

There are still other conditions. Healing may take place through the power of faith (Mark 9:23)--"Jesus said unto him, if thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth". This type of faith is not to be confused with the "gift of faith". Faith as an act or state of being is subject to a variety of qualifications and is not unwavering. The "gift of faith" (I Corinthians 12:29) is only given in rare cases to especially holy people and (in its perfection) is viewed by saints as an unwavering, perfect manifestation of the power of God. Healing, or virtually any other act, can be effected through the gift of faith . Healing also can be effected through the "gift of healing" (I Corinthians 12:9). Unlike the "gift of faith", the power in this gift is specified solely for healing. Like the "gift of faith", the "gift of healing" is considered by saints to be a most perfect manifestation and is provided to few people. This is especially true at a young church such as The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name. Most members can think of perhaps only one or two people that they have known who possessed the perfect gifts of faith and healing.[8]

As discussed briefly at the beginning of this chapter, the various administrations allow latitude and flexibility of interpretation in accounting for apparent lapses of power. Most of the administrations contain inherent provisos which delimit times and circumstances of their applicability. Faith, for example, can weaken or waiver. Anointing is defined as being variable and can be affected by distractions, divisive spirits, etc.. Or, the "elders" of the church might not be of "one accord", thereby weakening healing power. Similarly, the "gifts" may be imperfect, misunderstood, or misapplied.

Members commonly seek healing during church services. Officiating preachers mention throughout the service that the ". . . sick and afflicted" should come up to the front of the church to be prayed for and/or anointed with oil. So called "prayer lines" may be called a number of times during a service.

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[8] Considerable confusion exists in this area as neophytes sometimes are overly enthusiastic about their initial successes and tend to assume that they possess these special gifts. Unsuccessful healings and injury from serpent-bite usually persuades such individuals and the group as a whole that they were working in some less reliable administration, or without power.

This consists of asking sick people to come forward to be prayed for. Sometimes as many as five to twelve saints pray over a sick person. These sessions last only a few minutes. Prayed for saints often shake, shout, scream, speak in tongues, fall onto the floor, etc.. People request prayer for both major and minor illnesses. One saint may complain of heart trouble while another may ask members to pray over a sore foot or thumb. Other saints seek prayer for weariness, nervousness, or the pains and disappointments of life. Afflicted parts of the body are anointed with the (olive) oil. In The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name, only individuals of the same sex apply the oil. (At some so called free love serpent-handling congregations this prohibition is not adhered to.)

Healing is not restricted to prayer lines. The following excerpt from Brother Alfred emphasizes this and depicts some of the important features of healing that saints mention in their preaching and testimonies (tape transcription, August 20, 1972, church service):

> God's not dead, He's still alive! Glory to God! I believe today that He is still alive, Brother Rubel. Allelujah! He's not dead, amen. If you're sick here today, I want you to do just what these other two sisters done, amen. In any of my services or any of the services where I'm preaching or something, I don't want you to wait for a prayer line to be called. If you're sick, the minute that you feel that you can come up here, amen, and reach out to God and get what you want, that's the time to come.
>
> Don't wait for a prayer line, amen, don't wait for a call to prayer for the sick, amen, because the minister

> is your servant, amen, thank God. . . So when you get sick, amen and you need to get hold of God for something, amen, then you start working on your faith, amen, and building it up, glory to God, where you can reach out to God, amen. . .
>
> Now, I'll tell you right now, if you come to the house of God when you sick, amen, and you come in there, you don't have to go to no one except to God's house to get your healing. And if you come in there and you pray and pray and you can't get hold of your healin' just go back home and start saying, God, what is it, what have I got between me and you that's separating me from you, amen, because God will do His work and if they's anything hindering it, it has to be you. . .

Brother Alfred emphasized that the onus is on the individual if healing fails, thus establishing the primary of faith in healing. Alfred also noted that some sickness should be viewed as being a "chastisement from God". Given this view, healing that fails may be explained by saying that perhaps God was notyet ready to "lift the chastisement"):

> . . . God sometimes uses sickness to chastise His people, to make them pray, and to bring them in line with the Word of God. And, in the event a person was afflicted under the chastisement of God, then, prayer won't heal 'em until the period of chastisement is past, until God is through chastising. Then, you can't heal a person even by praying the prayer of faith and actually the perfect gift of faith, or the perfect sign, a, would tell you right away, don't pray for this person, they're a, they're a chastised or something along that line. . . In other words if a person; God is dealing with a person and chastises them, then my praying for them wouldn't be effective because I would be trying, a, praying against the will of God . . . (Ibid.)

Not all healing is attempted as described above. Some people who desire healing, simply indicate this during prayer requests. Sick people who are not present during a service are also mentioned during prayer requests and are included in the prayers of church members. The sick who live some distance from the church, or who are hospitalized often request that "prayer cloths" be sent to them. These are small cotton cloths that are anointed with oil and prayed over by saints, (often in a very emotional fashion). Saints believe that power is transferred into the cloths, and that this power can facilitate healing. Saints also pray for one another over the telephone, or gather at a sick member's home or hospital room.

Praying for sick members is particularly crucial when someone has suffered from serpent-bite. Injured saints can become frightened and seek out medical aid. Community support through prayer has helped many saints overcome this fear. Often when saints are injured and need prayer, members from churches of 300 to 500 miles away might travel to the church to pray for and provide support for the victim.[9]

Healing often becomes a controversial issue for saints. Ideally siants hold that faith can heal every illness, but as stated by Brother Rubel: "Times are hard and faith is sometimes weak". Not all saints totally rely on Divine healing. In many cases physicians are called in for accidents and serious illness. How much, if any, reliance should be placed on physicians? This question is difficult for members to resolve. And, like other issues in the church, it is negotiated during ongoing interaction.

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[9] I know of a case where a saint from Georgia was bitten at a service in Kentucky and members of his home church chartered a twin engine plane to fly him bakc to Georgia where members of the church could pray for him in unison. (Elifson/Tripp, personal conversation, April 2, 1976).

Working in the signs--A Summary--To this point in the discussion members' ritualized use of power has been examined. This aspect of serpent-handlers' behavior is relatively well known in the scientific and popular literature. I have attempted to deal with "working in the five signs" in a systematic fashion, as phenomena (interesting in themselves) which are important to the creation and maintenance of the community.[10]

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[10] Not mentioned in this discussion is fire handling. Although fire handling is not one of the five signs, it is used in a similar fashion--i.e,, as a demonstration of Gods' power to sinners. This practice is derived primarily from Daniel 3:25 (which refers to the Old Testament prophets who were placed into a fiery furnace and escaped harm). I have witnessed only one incident of fire handling at the church (in December 1974). The practice of fire handling was evidently quite important in serpent-handlings' past. Stories are told of saints at other churches who would sit on hot stoves, handle burning coals or logs. A few churches today in Appalachia are noted for their consistent performances of fire handling. The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name is not one of them. Just after the church was formed a couple of members attempted to handle burning newspapers, but this practice did not persist as most saints considered this an ineffective demonstration. During the summer of 1973 saints experimented with passing their hands and arms through a flame produced by sticking a wick into a pop bottle filled with kerosene. The, in December, 1974, I observed at least three or four saints pass their hands (or, in one instance, feet) through a small blow torch. As a ritual performance fire handling is extremely simple. A blow torch or other source of fire is placed on the pulpit at the beginning of the service. If anyone feels the anointing to handle fire, the torch is lighted with a match and the anointed person holds it while passing his hands through the flame. Some

Bounded ritual performances and their outcomes must be viewed against the background of members' everyday experiences. If this dimension is neglected, as it generally has been (see Birckhead 1976), an unbalanced picture of serpent-handling as a social movement emerges. This is not a unique problem in anthropological research. As noted by Pelto (1975:19): "Ethnographers often report the stereotype of the 'big wedding', . . . omitting mention of the more usual, less magnificant occasions".

Ritual uses of power in church services or related activities are of great importance to the community, but they do not exhaust the contexts in which saints report that power affects their lives. While only a handlful of saints in the church actually handle serpents or drink poison, most people of the community claim to experience various possession states outside the formal church setting. Some of these claims will now be examined.

Power and Everyday Life--The subject of power in everyday life provides a wide focus. Not all uses or experiences of

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people pass their hands through the flame quickly while others keep their hands in the flame for longer periods of time. In one incident that I witnessed, a brother (Ralph Eslinger) took off his shoes and socks and held the flame to the soles of his feet for a number of seconds, apparently not affected by the flame. During this same service a teenage girl handled fire and I later learned that she was burned by it. This ritual is of minor importance at The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name and will not be dealt with further. (When this "sign" fails, people handle the disconfirmation the same as in other areas where power is utilized.)

can be dealt with here. Of particular interest are cases where serpent-handlers claim to experience, and testify about the effects of power in: (1) preventing personal catastrophes; (2) protecting "God's people" from their enemies; (3) in promoting the ongoing ministry of the church; and, (4) discernment. These broadly conceived categories are not mutually exclusive.

(1) Preventing accidents--Saints claim that God frequently intervenes on their behalf to prevent serious accidents from occurring. Liston Pack testified at an evening church service that (fieldnotes, July 26, 1972):

> . . . a miracle had been performed. Monday on his way home after the service, two cars were driving toward him. He did not know what to do as a telephone pole was in the way so he could not drive off of the road. There was only a few feet to spare. God pulled him through, as he could not have done it himself. The Devil tried making him believe that it was not done by God. He also wanted Liston to follow the car and get angry at the driver. Liston resisted the temptation and stuck with miracle interpretation.

Similarly, Brother Liston, a truck driver, related that (fieldnotes, November 26, 1972): ". . . once when he was tired his truck started to run off the road. He prayed to the Lord and he felt something overcome him and it was almost as if the truck was lifted back onto the road".

One final example will suffice. This case is taken from a transcript of a sermon by Rev. Elzie Preast of the Scrabble Creek Church Of All Nations (in Dickenson and Benziger 1974:79):

> I was going up a mountain one time with a truckload of slag, in low gear. And I seen in a vision a car coming around the curve. Before the car ever come round the curve, I seen it in a vision. And the Lord let me see it--why? So I could be on the watch. I got up a little closer to the curve and here comes the car. Around the curve. On the wrong side of the road. Over against a barrier two or three feet high where they'd rised it up around the top of the bank with dirt. And he hit that pile of dirt on the wrong side of the road--which would have been on my side. . . Now you say the Lord doesn't show you, doesn't protect you? The Lord can warn you. He can warn you in dreams. He can let you see a vision. He can let you feel that something's coming. . . He said he'd show you things to come. So evidently the devil must have been seeking my life. And the Lord let me see that and stopped him. Bless the Lord. Now whence comest thou? He may be driving an automobile, drunk. And he may be doped up. He may be smoking pot or he may be taking some kind of shot. That's what causes people to do what they do. It's the devil.

(2) Protecting "God's People" from their enemies--Related to the above are cases where saints perceive that God's power protected them from enemies. For example, Brother Johnny testified about how he was illegally taken to jail. In the jail cell one of his old "friends" (from before his conversion) wanted to "whup" him. Brother Johnny told the sinner: "You can't touch me." The power of God prevented Johnny from sustaining a beating (fieldnotes, November 1, 1972).

In another incident, two church sisters and the husband of one of them felt anointing to sing and testify on the courthouse lawn. Two women tried to push and harass the female singers, when the deputy sheriff (who allegedly hated snake-handlers) ". . . took a limb from a tree and switched their legs (of the harrassing women)". As the saints reported: "The anointing will protect you one way or another. People can't get through it" (fieldnotes, December 1974).

Finally, on another occasion (November 12, 1972) someone attempted to set the church house of fire. The women's outhouse was destroyed and a hole was burned in the pulpit. In addition, an expensive set of drums was stolen. Saints found it reportable that the person attempted to burn the church house, but it would not burn as "the Lord protected it" (fieldnotes, November 12, 1972). This incident was reported on for a number of weeks after its occurance. As summarized by Brother Grooms (fieldnotes):

> This is the only church around here that preaches the truth and the Devil tried stopping it. The outside of the building was set on fire, but it didn't burn. Ordinarily it would have burned, but the Lord protected it and wouldn't let it burn. . .

(3) Promoting ministry of the church--Saints also cite incidents in which power is useful in the ongoing ministry of the church. Liston Pack, for example, reported that (fieldnotes, November 26, 1972):

> He was hauling to Carterville, Georgia and found himself leaving the Inter-State on the exit ramp. He could not figure it out, so he drove back onto the entrance ramp. A black man was standing there hitchhiking. Liston then knew why he had left the highway and what the Lord wanted him to do-give the man a ride. The hitchhiker had been standing there for about four days and had not eaten during that time. . . Liston gave him his canned ham to eat and gave him some money.

This provided the preacher with an opportunity to witness to the hitchhiker, as well as to manifest the ideal of Christian love and concern for one's brother.

On other instances, saints claim to receive the anointing to testify while on their jobs or during other circumstances. In the previously mentioned case involving the brother who was arrested, not only did he receive power to protect him from harm, but he also testified that he received anointing to preach to a cell mate ". . . who didn't believe in heaven or hell". After performing this task, Brother Johnny told the other men in the jail cell that he would be released at 7 a.m. the following day, and, indeed he was released at that time as he had predicted. As concluded by Brother Johnny: "When you have the anointing you can see these things" (fieldnotes, November 1, 1972).

(4) Discernment--What the brother was talking about in the above example is known by members as the gift of discernment. This gift is considered to be of great value in proselytizing for the church and in interpersonal relationships in general. Through this gift saints claim to be able to judge the hidden or true character of a person. Brother Alfred Ball states regarding discerning spirits that (tape transcription, December 1974):

> The anointing of God can work anywhere, anytime. I've had it to work walking down the street . . . there's lots of different gifts and one thing in particular, the anointing of God, I have had it to move upon me with the gift of discernment and been able, as far away as I could see a man or a person, though I've

> maybe never seen him before, didn't know who they were, to immediately know what kind of person that was. To know if they were a Christian or if they were sincere or if they were hypocrite. The discernment, the gift of discernment can be so strong as to actually open the mind of a person just as if, just as if, and I am saying as if, just as if you were actually reading the very thoughts of their mind. It's not mind reading . . . I have had the gift of discernment to operate so strong as to actually reveal the very thoughts of an individual's mind to me. . .

The above examples illustrate some of the ways that saints utilize their belief that supernatural power mediates everyday life. Numerous other examples could be cited. Some saints report that because of God's power their work day in the carnal world seems much shorter. Saints frequently claim to experience auditory sensations of God's presence or report that they hear Him speak directly to them or see the Lord manifested in vivid visions. As previously discussed, saints claim to receive prophecies in dreams and visions. Saints also receive power to testify and to preach at their places of work, to handle serpents outside of church, and to speak in tongues on any number of occasions. Family life is also said to be improved by the anointing power. And, saints routinely rely on power to save them from accidents and enemies, and in general to promote the ongoing ministry of the church.

CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has discussed power as conceptualized, experienced, acquired, and utilized by saints. These expectations and experiences may be seen as important factors in the creation and maintenance of a community of saints. Serpent-handlers' distinctive identity derives in large part from their notion of being a "separated people", "a peculiar people", or "God's children". Serpent-handlers like to think of themselves as saints and apostles.

In addition to their use of history, the saints continually employ daily experiences to reinforce their identity as "God's children". The reporting of these experiences to the congregation as a whole gives mutual reinforcement of faith and makes into seeming fact the view that the saints as children of God, can expect power to act in a variety of beneficial ways. But supernatural power is unpredictable and socially explosive. How this force is socially harnessed will be explored in Chapter VIII.

CHAPTER VIII

POWER AS PROBLEMATIC

Power is problematic on a number of levels. As already indicated throughout this study, power ostensibly "fails" on many occasions. As we have noted, a few members of the church have been bitten by rattlesnakes and copperheads and two members died from consuming strychnine. The sick sometimes are not healed and demons are not always routed. Church services and other activities are sabotaged occasionally by spirits and people are sometimes plagued by various demons. Dreams, visions, and discerning spirits sometimes reveal information and that is potentially socially disruptive.

In situations when the signs apparently fail or power proves socially disruptive, serpent-handlers, it would seem, are faced with the problems of: (1) explaining "why" to the wider community of non-believers, including perhaps, the circuit court and neighbors and relatives; and (2) maintaining meaning and credibility within their own ranks. Not all participants effectively deal with apparent disconfirmations of faith. Indeed, many people in serpent-handling backslide or leave the religion permanently as a result of serious incidents of snakebite, etc.. Saints' difficulties in communicating with the outside world are heightened by the fact that most outsiders do not share the sub-religious dialect of serpent-handling or even of fundamental Pentecostalism. In the face of this, however, sinners continue to be saved, new churches are being founded, and serpents are handled. It is this ongoing viability and vitality to which this thesis addresses itself. As will be demonstrated, dramatic as well as prosaic problems with the concept of power provide examples not only of saints' ongoing construction of a serpent-handling reality but also, of the difficulties members encounter in translating individual mystical experiences, socially. This forms the basis of many conflicts in the church especially regarding questions of authority, meaning, consensus, and appropriate behavior for saints. The remainder of this chapter will describe and analyze specific cases. These cases will be divided into three general categories: (1) power and preaching; (2) when signs fail; and, (3) power and decision-making in everyday life. The problematic dimension of the utilization of supernatural power is emphasized. The presentation of the cases will be followed by an analytical conclusion.

POWER AND PREACHING

Church services are ideally "led by the spirit" and do not follow a planned format. Consequently, some services last for only a half an hour while others might continue for four hours or longer depending upon whether or not a "good spirit" is present. Ideally, then, the particular features of any given church service are prompted by the spirit. This includes singing, testifying, preaching, teaching, working in the signs, duration and intensity. In other words, "people are free to follow the spirit" wherever it may lead. This ideal is potentially volatile if taken to its logical conclusion for inherent in it is the very real specter of total anarchy.

While church services ideally proceed as directed by the spirit, there are definite rules of appropriateness. Saints are faced with the task of translating the generalized power of the spirit into appropriate social behavior. Preaching, for example, is subject to a number of constraints regarding corpus, timing, style, religious lexicon, and context.[1] The basic rule saints rely on in this regard is: "the spirit of God will never cause someone to go against His Word". If someone were to act in an unacceptable manner it would be interpreted as demon possession, working in the "carnal mind", or ignorance. Deciding what is spirit filled preaching is neither clear cur not is it final. Such a verdict is always open to further discussion.

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[1] Borker (1974) provides a number of examples from Scottish Evangelical churches, of strategies utilized by preachers to deal with the situational constraints of preaching the gospel. Although this is not my specific focus, Borker's sociolinguistic approach to preaching could be applied to preaching strategies of serpent-handlers.

There may be as many as ten to twelve preachers present at any church service (consistent with the idea of the priesthood of all believers). Even at small, mid-week gatherings two to five preachers often are present. As services usually do not last for longer than three or four hours, sometimes it is difficult for all the preachers who feel anointed to preach to find the opportunity to present a message. This is exacerbated by the fact that during the week night services people are anxious to leave at a reasonable hour as most are tired from a hard days work. Consequently, preachers may feel the anointing to preach and may not be afforded the opportunity. This can lead to bad feelings, conflict, and frustration. The converse situation sometimes arises when it is difficult to find anyone who has the anointing to preach the message. At times like this the person in charge of the service inquires one by one of the brothers in the amen corner, "who's got the message".

The problem of the preacher who continues to preach even when the anointing has departed is practically and theoretically interesting. When this happens he is not only boring people and prolonging the service, but even worse, taking up time that anointed preachers could utilize to present their spirit filled messages. The following excerpts from my field notes provide examples of how saints view this problem. Brother Alfred succinctly summarizes the attitude professed by saints (tape transcription, August 20, 1972):

> I, I talked a little bit here longer than I had intention of doing, but when God begins to talk to me, amen, cause that's the only time I could, amen. God can give me more to say to you in five minutes that I could think of in five days, and it'll help you more, amen. . .

Or, as Brother Robert points out (fieldnotes, November 1, 1972): "Some preachers drag out the service and talk even when the anointing is gone. Lets not drag it out".

A number of preachers are noted for dragging out church services. When this happens the preacher often will make an apology to the congregation. Etiquette demands that the preachers in the amen corner respond with: "Follow the Lord, Brother". This can serve either to encourage the preacher to continue if he is anointed to preach, or to remind him that preaching is appropriate only when anointing is present. For example, Brother Jimmy had been preaching for approximately an hour when he switched abruptly from a preaching to a conversational style saying that: ". . . he didn't mean to take so long, but he better stop because if he really got going, he would preach for quite awhile. Brother Liston and Brother Drew told him to obey the Lord" (fieldnotes, November 15, 1972).

Thus, the onus is placed on the preacher to present the message in such a way that it is evident that he has the anointing and is indeed obeying the Lord and not motivated by his own carnal mind. Often, however, preachers utilize stylized remarks such as made by Brother Jimmy to ascertain the congregations' responsiveness to their continued preaching. If the speaker is to act appropriately, he must determine the meaning behind the brothers' admonition to "obey the Lord". In other words, are the brothers saying that he has talked too long or, are they in fact encouraging him to continue? This is an interaction scene that each preacher must negotiate by relying on his background knowledge of the community's subtle and tacit rules of appropriateness. Obviously, the speaker must accurately judge the mood of the congregation. The number of "amens" spontaneously proclaimed by individuals in the congregation, the number of people "slipping out" the back door, the level of whispering and fidgeting, the behavior of the musicians (whether or not they tune their guitars or strum cords during the preaching), are all indicators that the preacher has exceeded the appropriate time frame and is considered to have lost the anointing to preach. If all of the above cues are present and the preacher continues to present the message, he is leaving himself open to criticism. His inappropriate preaching might provide the basis for another preacher's sermon. Although the pracher will not cite the violator by name, the "guilty" person and the community of saints will have no difficulty in recognizing the meaning of the message.

On the other hand, young preachers are accused sometimes of not preaching often or long enough. For example, the pastor made the following point (fieldnotes, July 26, 1972):

> . . . that Wednesdays were especially set aside for young preachers to gain experience as this might be their only chance. (He seemed to be rebuking an old brother for taking up so much time preaching). He then asked if any of the young preachers had anything to say. He called on Brother J. who declined to speak. He called on Brother B. emphasizing to him that he was an ordained minister who seldom preached. B. declined. . .

Quite awhile later, B. (fieldnotes, November 1, 1972) stated that: ". . . people often say that he doesn't testify enough. When a message is given him (by the Lord) he will testify. If that doesn't happen, he will wait five years if necessary for a message. . ." In this case the social learning dimension of preaching was being emphasized by the pastor. Young preachers need to practice their art. This conflicts in part with the ideal that "messages are provided by God". Thus, Brother B.'s response was presented in a rather self righteous tone. Implicit in his statement is the message that he would not compromise the ideal even though other older brothers might.

The situation also occurs where preachers who had the anointing to preach did not actualize it and as a result left the services frustrated. Sometimes preachers who have experienced this frustration at one service will attempt to regain the anointing at the following service, or failing this, attempt to preach without the power. This can beget boredom and restlessness among the hearers. By way of a brief example (fieldnotes, August 6, 1972):

> Brother D. announced that last night he had the anointing to preach and should have done it. (It was getting late and I think that he felt a subtle

> pressure not to preach.) Tonight he didn't have the anointing and could only testify. It was obvious that he did not have the anointing and was not up to the task of converting and prolonging a testimony into a message. B., J., and others in the congregation exchanged knowing glances. D. preached inspite of this pressure.

Ideally, a person "moved by the spirit" to speak has something to say and is serving as an instrument of the Lord. While any anointed person should be vital and interesting to hear, this is not always the case. Another dimension must be considered, that of interest. Members recognize a wide range of preaching competence and incompetence. Saints in fact have favorite preachers. Certain preachers are noted for preaching too long or for presenting boring sermons. Serpent-handlers account for this by saying that some preachers receive a better anointing to preach than do others. "Gifted" preachers "pay the price" by fasting, praying, and reading the Scriptures and are therefore blessed by God with a "good anointing to preach". Preachers who do this concentrate on certain themes as they study the Bible and through prayer and fasting achieve the proper mental set to best effect a competent performance. Even though preachers ideally receive their messages from God and eschew reading from a prepared text or preparing their sermons, many do study the Scriptures before hand, think in terms of certain Biblical themes, and in effect do the necessary background work so that when the "spirit moves" them to preach, they are ready. This helps insure that preachers do not misquote or misunderstand the

Word that they are presenting. Preaching heresy is always a possibility, especially for young preachers.

Consensus on such matters is difficult to reach and ultimately the matter is resolved by people informally discussing the issue in small groups or factions, and examining the pertinent Scriptures under debate. If the preacher incorrectly quoted or applied the Word, this is pointed out to him, usually after the church service. It is considered a breach of etiquette to interrupt a preacher who "has the pulpit". Sometimes these matters take weeks or months to resolve.

This discussion of preaching by no means exhausts all the relevant dimensions of this topic. My point here was to illustrate some of the problems that arise from saints' reliance on supernatural power or order this aspect of their religious life, rather than to focus on preaching as a discrete domain and explicate all of its communicative features. In general, deciding whether or not power is operative proves problematic for saints. Hard and fast precedents are not established in this oral tradition and each situation must be negotiated and renegotiated for the purpose at hand, against saints' background knowledge.

WHEN SIGNS FAIL

In looking specifically at signs that "fail" the emphasis is basically the same as in the discussion of the problematic dimension of power and preaching. In this discussion ten cases will be presented to illustrate how accounts and meaning are arrived at through ongoing negotiations. These examples provide data on how members sustain the facticity of supernatural power even when performance claims seem to be contradicted. The examples cited here are selected specifically for the particular emphasis that they provide. My aim is not to present all of the instances that I have data on. Analysis will concentrate on inherent ambiguities in the system, differing interpretations of events, the resultant negotiation, the ongoing nature of accounting practices, and the translation of individuals' ecstatic experiences into appropriate social behavior.

Case I--This case deals with an instance of serpent-bite. The following account was presented by Brother Jimmy during his taking of prayer requests at the opening of a church service in December, 1972 (from tape transcription):

> . . . Amen, if God wants to work out a purpose, amen, He said He's send serpents and cockatrices amongst you and they will bite you sayest the Lord. Yea, amen. Amen, every now and then God works out a purpose, amen.
> There was one time, bless the Lord, the brothers brought in some big wild ones right out of the moutains, bless the Lord. There was one of the sisters sittin' back there at the back and one punched the other and said, 'Lord', said, 'if them brothers get bit with one of them serpents', said, 'they'll die before they get 'em out of this hollow'. Amen, just let me show you how the power of God works and how God's mind works. Amen, so the sister she thought if anybody got serpent-bit they'd die before they got out of here. Amen, but that wasn't

> the mind of God. Just as sure as the brother went in the serpent box he got bit. Amen. I know he really got bit. Bless the Lord! Amen, it swelled up his hand a little bit, that's all it ever done. Thank God! That showed, bless the Lord, right here, that God has got all power in heaven and in earth. Bless the Lord!

The case of serpent-bite Brother Jimmy was reporting on had occurred some two years earlier.[2] His account may be viewed as a selective reconstruction of action completed. My emphasis is on the dynamics and uses of this selectivity.

The account is clearly pedagogical in that the preacher explicates very important principles of the religion. The main principle being illustrated in that God can "work out a purpose" that may be beyond man's carnal comprehension. Brother Jimmy purported to provide some insight into ". . . how God's mind works". It is also of interest that he concluded the tale by affirming what I take to be the central organizing premise of the religion, ". . . that God has got all power in heaven and in earth". This is not unusual as saints accounts often emphasize the invariable prepositions of the religion.

To fully understand Brother Jimmy's narrative[3] something must be said of the total lesson in which it was embedded.

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[2] It is noteworthy that Brother Jimmy did not specify when the incident of serpent-bite took place. This is consistent with saints' reckoning of time as discussed in Chapter II. Dates do not need to be provided as most members already share this knowledge by virtue of community membership.

[3] I am calling this account narrative after the work of Labove and Waletsky (1966:20-21), who view narrative as ". . . one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequences of events which

Prior to recounting the incident of serpent-bite, Jimmy was instructing the congregation on the anointing to work in the signs. It is obvious that part of his purpose for presenting this material was to account for and make sense of the serpent-bite that Brother Bill had received a number of weeks before. (Brother Bill had quit attending services after his injury from serpent bite. This particular service was one of his first since the injury). What preceeded the account in question is as follows. (Important points are underlined):

> . . . Bless the Lord. Let's be much in prayer for all these prayer requests, amen. Now, Brother Bill, he was serpent-bit a few weeks ago, amen, just don't know how long ago it was, but he got serpent-bit, amen. And the Lord began to move, amen. I told Brother Bill that I believed that I had assurance from God that he was goin' to be completely recovered to where he wouldn't lose nothin'. Amen! Amen, you do something for God, He won't let you lose nothin'. Bless the Lord, amen! Now when you get serpent-bit, well, it's a bad thing, amen. I'll tell you tonight it is --when you really get serpent-bit. I'm not talking about sticking your hand in the box and getting it caught on the screen, punching a little hole in your finger or somethin' another. I'm talking about really getting serpent-bit. Bless the Lord! When you do, you better have God in the

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actually occurred", utilizing ". . . the same order as the original events". This type of narrative structure is viewed as an emergent form of simple oral narrative rather than as ". . . the more complex products of long-standing literary or oral traditions" (Labove and Waletsky 1966:12). What is interesting about these narrative accounts in serpent-handling is that they are embedded in sermons, testimonies, and casual conversations, which on the whole do not follow a narrative presentation sequence. It is my contention that serpent-handlers effectively use such accounts to provide particular emphasis to the illustration of abstract principles or in explaining apparent contradictions between belief and activity. I plan to develop this theme in a future paper, as it is not central to this study.

> arrangements. If you don't, amen, you're going to suffer loss, you're goin' to get hurt. Amen! Now I've been serpent-bit before and I ain't nairy bit ashamed of it, thank God. I ain't ashamed of it at all, Brother Bill. Amen, I's tell the president or anybody, tell the sheriff downtown, the President of the United States or anybody. I've been serpent-bit twice and I've been hurt twice, amen. The anointing wasn't even there when I got hurt neither. Amen! But the Bible teaches me when the hedge is broken, then the serpent will bite. Amen, when that hedge gets broken for any reason whatsoever--whether God breaks it or you break it, amen, then you might get hurt. Amen, you might do that. Amen! Now I'm not goin' to tell you you won't get hurt. Amen, but you will get hurt just as sure as you miss the perfect anointing of God, amen. Amen, now God, bless the Lord! Let me demonstrate it just a little further, amen. I believe with all my heart that my mother is a, is a woman that loves me. Thank God! Amen, I believe my mother does, she really loves me, amen. I don't believe sh'ed send me to the spring for a bucket of water and knowing good and well they was a big lion down there on the trail goin' to jump on me. Amen! I believe, amen, if God tells you to get in and take up serpents, amen, I don't believe there're going to hurt you. Amen, but if you get in there because you wanna get in there or for some other reason or some other purpose, amen, you might get hurt. You might get killed, amen, just anything might happen to you. Amen, if God wants to work out a purpose, amen, He said He'ed send serpents and cocatrises amongst you and they will . . . bite you, sayest the Lord. Yea, amen! Amen, every now and then God works out a purpose, amen.
>
> There was one time. . .

(It was at this point in the instruction that Brother Jimmy gave the account of the case of serpent bite that is being discussed in this section.) In the above excerpt, Brother Jimmy mentioned a number of important features of taking up serpents and of the religion in general. God is viewed as trustworthy and protective of His children, not unlike one's own mother would be. Consequently, if one does "something for

God" and "has God in the arrangements" then injury or death will not occur. When Jimmy was serpent-bit and injured, he did not have the anointing. Yet, he emphasized that this is nothing to be ashamed of, implying that these are some of the rigors of acquiring religious knowledge. He also made a distinction between "really getting serpent-bit" and "punching a little hole in your finger" (on the box screen). This is an important point as saints have claimed that they were serpent-bit when actually they had scratched their hand on the screen. Some saints attempt to use such injuries to demonstrate that their anointing was so strong that they did not swell up. Most members of the community could make sense of this aspect of the testimony and relate it to specific cases because of the intimate background knowledge that they share. Jimmy also noted another underlying principle of the religion, that God can allow the "hedge to be broken" in order "to work out a special purpose".

Brother Jimmy concluded his testimony or lesson with the following warning to serpent-handlers:

> . . . So that's good instruction. When you take up serpents, amen, keep 'em to yourself. Amen! When I'm sitting over here on the front seat or setting over here, amen, and God lays it on you Brother Al to take up serpents, amen, just stay back away from me. If I want 'em, I'll come and get 'em. Amen! Your anointing, Brother Al, don't work for me, amen. I have to feel it my own self. Amen, I can't sing your song and you can't testify for me. Thank God, amen! What right have I got, amen, to put my anointing over here and endanger your life, Brother Al? I ain't got no business whatsoever endangering Brother Lester's life. Un uh, amen. When I get hold of 'em, I take care of

> Yea! Amen! I want to protect you just like God does. Amen, thank God! Amen, if I bring you one over here, Brother Al, you'll be ready to take it. Yea Lord! If it bites you and hurts you, you can say that Brother Williams was wrong. Amen, thank God! Bless the Lord! When you get anointing to take up serpents, amen, just handle him right in here, amen. Don't get back in here amongst these children . . . because they might hurt somebody. Amen, they might do that, they've got power to do that. Just as sure as the devil moves in there that's just as sure as the devil will throw a wrench in the column. Bless the Lord! Amen! Amen, some people don't like it 'cause I'm talking this way, amen, but I'd rather tell you now than to wait till we get somebody down at the funeral home and then tell you about it. . .

In the above instruction, Jimmy not only provided some procedural rules for serpent-handling, but in addition, provided some information on the workings of the devil. He also acknowledged (as preachers ferquently do) that not all members of the congregation would necessarily be in agreement with his teaching.

In looking at the above accounts a number of conclusions can be reached. Namely, it is noteworthy the amount of information the preacher was able to convey while he was ostensibly taking prayer requests. In this regard, Brother Jimmy was not only reporting on particular events but through the reporting refining and elaborating the parameters of working with power. Through relating specific stories, Jimmy was able to create a sense of the existence of external, rule governed logical principles that the religion is premised on. Finally, this case demonstrates how accounts of past events are reintroduced by preachers for the purposes at hand, in this case, to create a context in which Brother Bill's serpent-bite would appear as a routine feature.

Case II--This case deals with the serpent-bite of sister Hammons of Greenville, South Carolina (July 22, 1973). In reporting on the incident, Brother Floyd (pastor) emphasized that the sister was ". . . a good sister and lived a good life". In addition, she often took up serpents. As further explained by Brother Floyd (fieldnotes July 22, 1973):

> . . . she usually stood back and waited for Floyd to take the serpents out of the box. She just didn't act like herself tonight. Instead of standing back and waiting, she proceeded to where Floyd was standing and looked at him. He shook his head and said, 'no Sister Hammons'. In other words Floyd was not ready to take up serpents. She then proceeded into the serpent box and was bitten on the hand. She then calmly placed the serpent back into the box. She was prayed for. . .
>
> Brother Floyd decided that for some reason Sister Hammons got ahead of the anointing when she reached into the box. She was obviously acting differently than usual. Something strange came over her. She wasn't herself. She obviously didn't have the anointing at that time. Timing is an important consideration in dealing with the anointing. . .

In accounting for this event, Brother Floyd relied on the notion that one must "wait" on the anointing. Implicit in Floyd's reporting of the event is that sisters wait on the anointing--i.e. sisters usually do not initiate serpent-handling by reaching into the serpent-box.

One other aspect of the reporting of this case is of interest. Saints were extremely worried about the sister's physical fate. She was known to have a bad heart and saints were concerned as she had succumbed to her husband's pressure and sought medical aid. As described in my fieldnotes (July 23, 1973):

> Once in Greenville At Floyd's house there was much rehashing about Sister Hammons. Lester, Al, Floyd, and the other people talked about it. Al and Floyd were quite concerned for her safety as she was in the hospital in intensive care. As both of them said, Sister Hammons is old and has a bad heart. They both fear when someone goes to the hosptial with serpent-bite. This is the work of the devil, as hospital treatment usually does the person more harm than good and discredits the church . . . Alfred said that he usually doesn't start to worry about someone until they are taken to the hospital; that is when the trouble begins. Floyd agreed. . .

In this instance, the reality of Satan's interference is given credance, as well as providing an additional explanation why injury occured when working in the signs.

The next problem faced by the saints was to ascertain why the sister (who lived a holy life) went to the hospital for healing instead of relying on the Lord as the church teaches. Members had to decide if she had had a lapse of faith or not. However, the problem was partially resolved when she reported that she went to the hospital because of her husband's threats to "make trouble" for the church if she did not go. So, for the good of the church as a whole, she complied with the wishes of her non-believing husband. Most saints accepted this as a valid reason, but nevertheless, regretted her hosptialization.

In this case, as in the previous one, the importance of members' reporting is illustrated. I maintain that through the reporting on their behavioral scenes members not only convey information, but also create a ". . . world in which information itself can appear" (Meehan and Wood 1975:12). It is through this reflexive activity that the facticity of a serpent-handling way of life is established.

Case III--This case deals with a serpent-bite received by Brother Jimmy in 1971. Prior to this incident, he believed that people who were serpent-bit had not "paid the price" and were therefore culpable. A couple of months before he was bitten, Jimmy told me that (fieldnotes, July 28, 1971): "Everyone needn't handle serpents in the church, just those with the talent". He went on to say that ". . . some people get snakebit because they don't really believe. . ." However, Jimmy was bitten by a rattlesnake in early September of 1971 and became quite ill as a result. Because of this experience, he reported that he developed himility and a greater knowledge of the Word. He also realized that he had overestimated his personal powers and taken too much credit for himself. Jimmy rendered accounts of this incident on a number of occasions to demonstrate that serpent bites can serve a pedagogic function and to emphasize that anointing is of God and does not reside in persons.

Case IV--This case is closely related to the one above. It deals with a serpent-bite received by Brother Alfred. Specifically, Alfred's wife was seriously ill and he promised

God that if He would allow her to recover he would gladly suffer serpent-bit. Alfred's wife was healed and Alfred was bitten by a copperhead. In the reporting of this story Alfred emphasizes that as a result of this incident he realized that this sort of bargain or bribe was not necessary in dealing with his God, who "is a strong God". One must grow and learn many hard lessons in this faith (fieldnotes July 29, 1973).

Case V--Brother Floyd was serpent-bit in Greenville, South Carolina (1971). In the reporting of the incident, he emphasized that since the copperhead bite he had not been bothered by kidney stones. The important feature of this account is that a serpent-bite can have a healing function.

Case VI--Richard Williams (Columbus, Ohio) died from a snake-bite he received in a Kistler, West Virginia church service in 1974. In accounting for his death, members made the following general points (Associated Press release in Edmonton Journal, June 15, 1974): (1) "Richard Lee was only 33, the same age as Jesus when he died"; (2) ". . . that brother laid down his life for his church and his belief"; (3) He refused to go to the hospital or to take any medicine; and, (4) he died a happy death--

> . . . The Bible says the last enemy we face is death and we seen this boy's victory over death. We seen him change. There was a love of God in him that we had never seen before. I've never seen a happier man in my life . . . He said, 'Dad, don't worry about me

> now, I wouldn't take nothing for my journey with Jesus'.

Others in the church reported that his death had been prophesized. The deceased brother's mother-in-law had a dream in which she saw him lying in a casket (Pelton and Carden 1976:163). (This case was cited primarily to demonstrate the variety of meanings arrived at by saints. As it is taken from secondary sources, it lacks a dynamic view of how meaning is negotiated.)

Case VII--This case deals with the rattlesnake bite received by Brother Billy Jay during a service on November 18, 1972 (already discussed in part in Case I), and was selected to illustrate different levels of interpretations and to provide insight into saints' ongoing construction of meaning. Also, this incident looks at public as opposed to backstage explanations. Unlike the other examples of serpent bite, I witnessed this incident and observed members' handling of the situation as it unfolded.

Brother Billy Jay was bitten during a service which was being filmed by researchers (Burton and Schrader) from East Tennessee State University for a documentary film ("They Shall Take Up Serpents", 1973). After Brother Billy Jay was bitten he was taken to the home of Brother Jimmy where he rested and saints prayed over him. The film makers accompanied the injured brother to Jimmy's and were given the following account by Jimmy (from film sound dub, courtesy

Mary Jane Coleman, Sinking Creek Film Festival, Greenville, Tennessee, December 1974):

> All right, the purpose we're here, Brother Bill is serpent, been serpent-bit in the church services a few minutes ago. All of you people were there. The reason we take these serpents up is the Bible recommends to do it and all the Apostles did it, everyone that believes. Jesus said, 'these signs shall follow them that Believe', He said, 'in my name shall they cast out devils, they shall speak new tongues, they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover'. Now if we believe that this interpretation of the Scripture is for them that believe, in other words, they that believe, they shall take up serpents.
>
> Jesus said, 'they shall send serpents and cockatrices amongst you and they will bite you sayest the Lord.' Amen, and we believe that serpents will bite you, amen, and large denominations and lots of people, different people, they teach that the serpent the Bible speaks of is a man or an unclean spirit, but, we teach and believe that the serpent crawls on its belly and eats the dust of the earth and these--what we know today as a rattlesnake or a copperhead, and the Lord said, 'they shall take up serpents'. We believe that them that believes have victory over them, bless the Lord. If they do bite you we don't put our faith and trust in a doctor but we put our faith and trust in the Lord, amen. We depend on Him to handle 'em, bless the Lord, and we depend on Him if they bite us. Bless God! So, bless the Lord! They has been some people that were serpent-bit and died, but we believe that they died doing the service of the Lord just like any of His other Apostles that died doing the work of the Lord.
>
> It might seem strange you folks being at our home tonight, we are gathered here tonight to pray for a brother that is serpent-bit, but, yet on the other hand most people go to the doctor when they get sick, just like the instructions in the Bible gives us--'They shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover'. Amen, we believe in the Bible, we believe that it's a literal interpretation, it's natural as well as spiritual. We believe in Divine Healin', that all healin' comes from God regardless if you're in the hospital and you get healed, we believeit's God that does the work. The

> doctor can only do what he has knowledge to do and it's God that does the healin'. So, we believe in Divine healin', it all comes from God. We're praying for the brother tonight that he will recover. He was serpent-bit in the service tonight. We believe God will be, God's going to heal him and we're still trustin' in the Lord. Regardless of how the outcome is or what happens, we will still believe in the Lord. We put God far above man. We do respect brothers, we respect men for what they are. We don't have anything against officials in government. We don't have anything against doctors or lawyers, but we believe in payin' tribute to whom tribute is due, but all power belong to the Lord and all praise and honor belongs to Jesus.

In the above interview Brother Jimmy discussed the incident of serpent-bite at a very general level. In communicating with a non-believing audience it was necessary for him to explain the basis of the faith and a number of other factors that would be a part of members background knowledge. He established the Scriptural basis of working in the signs, explained Divine healing, and communicated that no matter what the outcome members would not consider this a disconfirmation of faith. Jimmy also employed the theme that if a saint died from serpent-bite it would be in the ". . . service of the Lord just like any of His other Apostles that died doing the work of the Lord". He concluded by noting a basic premise of the religion, that ". . . all power belongs to the Lord. . ."

Brother Jimmy's statement to the film maker was completely ad hoc. He did not collaborate with others in the church in its preparation as the interview took place almost immediately after Billy Jay was bitten. It is noteworthy that in the interview Jimmy did not establish specifically why

Billy Jay was bitten. Members' interpretations, however, reach a more specific level in attempting to ascertain the particular meaning(s) of the event. This can be noted in the following interactions between saints.

The morning after Billy Jay's serpent-bite at a church baptism, Jimmy told me that the Lord had to ". . . get Bill's attention" to break him of his smoking habit--a habit that members agreed was hindering him from reaching true holiness. Jimmy went on to emphasize that the Apostles suffered for their beliefs and suffered when working for the Lord. Liston agreed with this but maintained that it was better to be bitten and not suffer at all. This is even a better manifestation of the anointing, preferable to not being bitten at all. In effect, Liston agreed that Billy Jay's suffering could be explained but that it was not a very effective sign for unbelievers. I then asked Liston how he would interpret a death from serpent-bite. He said that he would not venture a guess to such an issue, the implication being that it was too complicated an issue to answer simply and that it could not be answered apart from the actual situation. As demonstrated throughout this discussion, when such situations actually arise members indexically construct meaning and arrive at satisfactory explanations. This is not to imply that one uniform explantion is arrived at, only that members do find meaning(s) for such events throught their interactional work.

After church service that evening a number of us went to visit Billy Jay at Jimmy's house. The ensuing discussion remained at a fairly general level with various saints relating accounts of when they had been serpent-bit. People exchanged stories, always affirming the routine nature of the event that had transpired. It was generally agreed on that when ". . . you handle serpents as often as we do", sooner or later "you" will get "bit". Saints discussed particular details of the event--why had he allowed the two rattlesnakes to stretch out along his arm, had he been distracted by the presence of the film crew causing him to lose the anointing. . . Alfred and Jimmy recounted how they "took up" the rattlesnake that had bitten Billy Jay to allay peoples' fear and to demonstrate that the "Word is still the Word". Both brothers admitted that they did not have the anointing that evening and had handled the dangerous snake on faith, a procedure that they considered quite precarious.

Regarding the injured brother's fate, he was fired from his job at a local plant because he had missed work without a doctor's excuse. Church members provided some financial support to him through the collection of love offerings. Church members were asked frequently to pray for him as it was felt that the devil was trying hard to "work on him". Right after Billy Jay was serpent-bit, for example, his father pressured him to seek medical attention. He resisted, however, and relied on the Lord and the community of saints for his healing.

Within a few weeks of the serpent-bite it was reported by saints that Billy had "backsliden" on his faith. He no longer attended church services. He eventually returned, however, although I do not think that he has taken up serpents since his injury.

After this incident of serpent-bite, the frequency of serpent-handling in the church seemed to wane until sometime after January, 1973. Prior to this event, the frequency of serpent-handling appeared to be increasing. Although members ordinarily do not lose their beliefs because of serpent-bite, such occurrences can instill fear and discourage the working of dangerous signs until people regain confidence.

Case VIII--Jimmy Willams and Buford Pack died from strychnine that they consumed during a church service on April 7, 1973. Concerning the spiritual fates of the deceased brothers, the expressed concensus was that they ". . . were in that better place". This view was arrived at utilizing evidence that would be found incompatible with Western formal logic. Explanations of the meaning(s) of the deaths relied on members' background knowledge and on information provided in dreams, visions, and prophecies. Similarly, a number of otherwise unrelated events were interpreted by saints as having meaning regarding the deaths and the spiritual fates of the deceased saints (see Birckhead, 1974). In the general reporting of the case saints emphasized the following features of the event's meaning (fieldnotes, April 1973 emphasis mine):

> . . . at 7 p.m. or so, Jimmy drank strychnine without apparent injury. Later in the service when Buford consumed the poison, Jimmy drank another glass of it and fell over almost immediately afterward. He layed on the floor laughing before he passed out again . . . The sheriff brought Liston to the county jail. Liston said to him, 'I don't mean to be hard on you, but we are still going to take up serpents. The Word is still the Word, that hasn't changed.' . . . Liston told people that Brother Rubel was going to give him a blow torch to keep behind the pulpit. He had been thinking about getting the anointing to handle fire. . . Everyone that I talked to at Liston's house on the day of Buford's funeral agreed that Jimmy and Buford died of of the Word. Liston took me up to Jimmy's grave. There were many flowers on it with notes saying, 'Jesus called His home'. . . Jimmy's widow stated, 'Jimmy was baptized on a rainy, icy day and he left the world on the same kind of day. . .' (It was cold and snowy on the day of Jimmy's funeral. This was considered unusual for early April in Tennessee.)
>
> . . . At Buford's funeral (April 11, 1973), Alfred consoled their widows by saying that Bu and Jimmy are in a better place. They'll be waiting for you. They died serving the Lord in the Word. Brother John of of Detroit, Michigan preached the funeral. . . He said in his eulogy that God called Jimmy and Buford home because He wanted them. They are truly saints as they died in the Word doing what they believed in. The Word is still the Word.
>
> Before the burial, Brother Rubel told me that the men at the plant where he worked have been asking him what the church says now that this happened. Rubel told them that many people had been saying that it was only water and not deadly poison that the saints had been drinking, and now they know better. . .
>
> At the family cemetery where Buford was interred. . . Liston and Clyde took up serpents and reiterated what Buford often said--that if one had enough faith the dead could be raised, and not just the spiritually dead. . . That evening at prayer service at the church preachers emphasized that "the Word is still the Word" . . . (Carden and Pelton 1976:81-101 present an excellent journalistic account of the events surrounding the strychnine deaths.)

In one of the more reliable newspaper accounts of the deaths, Brother Liston emphasized prophecy in constructing his explanation (Newport Plain Talk, April 9, 1973 emphasis mine):

> . . . Rev. Pack told the Plain Talk that the church had practiced handling snakes as well as drinking strychnine and battery acid. He said both victims had drunk strychnine on previous occasions and had even drunk more than the doses which killed them Saturday night. He said Rev. Williams had written a will in his Bible some three months ago. 'He undoubtedly knew something was going to happen', Rev. Pack said.
>
> He said Buford Pack testified in the church Saturday night that a funeral would be held in four days, indicating that he felt his death was coming. . .

Liston went on to describe aspects of the service during which the men consumed the poison noting the following important features:

> . . . Before the services were over, Rev. Pack said he saw Rev. Williams lying on the floor of the church near the pulpit. He was laughing, Rev. Pack said. . . 'One of these men was my brother, and I've worshipped with the other man for five years now', said Pack. 'I believe they felt the same way I do. If I am bitten by a snake or drink strychnine and die, I'll be that much closer to the kingdom of God'. . .

The prophetic dimension was important for many in the church. Not only did Buford predict his death, but a number of brothers claimed that Jimmy had told them some five years ago of a vision in which the Lord told him that he had but five years to complete his work on earth. Also, considerable importance was placed on the fact that, as Liston related above, Jimmy had written a "will in his Bible some three months ago". The so called will specified the details of the manner in which Jimmy wanted his funeral conducted (the Williams' Family Bible):

> Upon death, my funeral should be conducted at the Church by the Elders of the Church, sing 'Precious memories' and 'Why Not Tonight'. Use the cheapest casket. Open the Bible to Mark 16:15-18, take up serpents and drink poison if anyone can. Put my body on the hill from the Church, read II Tim. 4:6-8. Do everything you can to show people that God's ways are right and man's ways are wrong. No necktie, have the bro's that I have took up serpents with for pall barrers. J.R.W. [5],[6]

That the two saints received prophecies of their passing led members to conclude that the brothers were indeed called home. This interpretation was reinforced by a number of other happenings reported by participants. Sister Bea, for example, recounted that on the night that the man died she had seen two white doves in the moonlight and Jimmy's smiling face ascending toward heaven (conversation with Bea Eslinger, April 15, 1973, Sevierville, Tennessee). From this, Sister Bea was assured that at least Jimmy was with God. She felt also that the men should not have consumed the poison as the Biblical injunction--". . . and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them"--applied only to those who unknowlingly drank poison in the camp of the enemy. Saints were not, according to this view, to consume poison voluntarily. However, Bea admitted that she did not understand it fully. Others in the church agreed with Sister Bea on this point of Scriptural interpretation. Similar to Bea's vision, Sister Eunice reported that at Jimmy's burial she saw him rise from his grave (conversation with Eunice Ball, July 18, 1973). At one of the evening services following Jimmy's funeral, Brother Rubel Campbell testified that he looked up toward the hillside graveyard and saw Brother Jimmy standing above the grave shouting and clapping his hands as he did when he was alive. A number of other people in the church reported on dreams or apparitions of the dead men. (I also had a vivid dream about Jimmy and told it to my close friends in the church who viewed it as further evidence of his spiritual fate.) Thus, although some disagreed with the brothers' act of drinking poison, it was concluded, partially based on dreams, visions, and background knowledge, that the saints were "allright with God".

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[5] II Tim.4:6-8, reads: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all then also that love his appearing".

[6] With respect to the claims that I make in Chapter II concerning serpent-handlers' handling of time, it is of note that Brother Jimmy's "Will" is not dated.

Part of the background knowledge shared by members of the community was the fact that both Jimmy and Buford had expressed a desire to die while working for the Lord. Neither of these men feared death and both expressed this feeling on a number occasions. Jimmy stated regarding the drinking of strychnine that (fieldnotes July 6, 1972): ". . . he felt that he had that anointing . . . He might die, but he was sure he was going to a better country. . ." Buford stated after being serpent-bit at a Brevard, North Carolina tent revival that (fieldnotes July 28, 1972): ". . . he didn't care if he died", the implication being that in death he would find a more abundant existence. For saints in general, death in the service of the Lord is made comprehensible by the fact that Christ and many of the early Apostles died for their faith. And as seen by Brother Alfred (transcript, April 21, 1973, recorded by Ralph Eslinger):

> . . . Don't you know thank God, tonight, He said if a man loses his life for the gospel sake, amen, he'll take it up again, a, glory to God. Tonight, I'm telling you, thank God, I'd rather lose my life in the gospel, amen, than any other way I know of for I've got a promise, amen, thank God, that I can take it up again. . .

The general consensus is that it is preferable to lose one's life in the service of the Lord than in an auto accident, bar room brawl, or racing car mishap.

In addition to the types of explanations already discussed, a number of members initially were puzzled by the deaths. As stated by Brother Alfred on the morning of Buford's funeral: ". . . there is a reason for this, some big thing, but it is not yet evident" (fieldnotes April 11, 1973). Other saints responded to the deaths by asserting that "The Bible says we must not question God" (in Daily Beacon April 30, 1973). From the theoretical perspective of this study, the meaning(s) attributed to the death can be seen as emergent and dependent on members' ongoing interactional work. Through members retrospective accounting, the significant features of the event's meaning are constructed and made evident.

One thing that people found meaningful was the fact that a number of religious people who had previously not heard of the church visited the church subsequent to the deaths, claiming that they had been "sent by the Lord". One such person was the Rev. Richard Williams, at the time pastor of serpent-handling congregations in Columbus, Ohio and Kistler, West Virginia. He had read about the deaths in a newspaper while he was working the night shift at a plant in Columbus. The Lord purportedly told him to travel to Newport to help the church. This was seen by members as being of significance as it provided evidence that at last God's people were being brought together. Brother Richard's message at a service on April 4, 1973 emphasized this (tape transcription, taped by Brother Ralph Eslinger):

> I've got the Holy Ghost, and when I picked up that newspaper and all these unblievers standing around mocking, the more they mocked, the more the Holy Ghost got me stirred. . . amen . . . honey, listen, amen, that's right, the more the devil kicks, the more power God's a gonna give us. . . Stand behind your leader . . . if there was ever a time that God's people need to join together, it's now. Paul said we are endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit. We need to keep the unity of the Spirit, amen, because the devil's number one objective is to break the unity of the Spirit. One writer told it like this, that the Spirit would go from breast to breast, amen. Ain't this the Word of God? Allright, let me say this tonight, if you got the Spirit going from breast to breast and the devil breaks one link, if he breaks one link, you got power cut off. Amen, you take electric line, if you got it to run from one cable to another and you got electricity, Brother Pack, and you go to break it in two anyplace, you'll have no power on the end of it. The same way with the Spirit

> of God. It goes from breast to breast and if you get one person sinning in the family, that power line will be broken. . .

The Rev. Buddy Harris, a non serpent-handling preacher from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, also claimed that the Lord told him to travel to The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name. His arrival provided additional evidence that the deaths could be seen as part of God's larger plan for bringing His people together. As expressed by Brother Alfred during a church service on Saturday, April 21, 1973 (tape transcript, taped by Brother Ralph Eslinger):

> . . . Well thank, a Brother Buddy Harris, amen, come over to be with us, amen. You know, God spoke to several people, amen, thank God tonight, and just sent them this way. Glory to God tonight! You know God and His Word, He said all things work together for the good of them that loves the Lord. Thank God tonight, amen! You know God takes the things that's happened to us glory tonight, amen, and uses toward our good and I believe, Brother Campbell, that He's taken them, thank God, and let 'em work to the good of other people. . .

In addition to Buddy Harris, Joel Hemphill, leader of the gospel group "The Singing Hemphills" journeyed to the church from Nashville, Tennessee also claiming that he was "sent by the Lord".

Besides the above mentioned people who claimed to be called directly by God, a number of serpent-handlers from other churches as well as fundamentalists of many persuasions travelled to the church. All of these occurrences gave further credance to this emergent meaning of the deaths--that God's people were being brought together.

Members also constructed meaning around the notion that the deaths served as a catalyst for spreading the gospel. (And as discussed in Chapter III, the increased publishing of the gospel is seen as being one indicator that the "last days" are at hand.) Brother Liston recalled that (fieldnotes, July 27, 1973):

> . . . at this point in time the church was starting to get scattered and the two deaths caused many people to learn of the church who ordinarily would not have heard of it. God had a purpose for all of this. Joel Hemphill, Richard Williams, Buddy Harris and others first heard of the church this way. In addition, Liston now has the chance to reach millions of people with the Word of God because of this new found access to radio and television.

In this vein, freelance writers Pelton and Carden and a number of students (Barrett) were attracted to the church because of the deaths. Pelton and Carden (1974, 1976) as well as Barrett (1973) produced works on the church, thereby aiding in the spread of the gospel.

Saints also found the meaning of the deaths in the resultant persecution and ridicule to which many members reported being subjected. Brother Robert Grooms told how he was smacked in the face by fellow workers who wanted to see if he "would turn the other cheek" (fieldnotes April 11, 1973). Brother Ralph recounted how men at the plant where he worked handed him cups of water claiming they contained strychnine or how they draped ropes over sticks acting as if the ropes were serpents. Other workers mimicked "being in the Spirit". Ralph's wife told how people at the resort hotel where she was employed as a chambermaid asked her if she ate snake sandwiches.

Jimmy's widow claimed that relatives exerted considerable pressure on her to join the Baptist Church and to forsake the religion "that killed her husband" (fieldnotes, April 11, 1973). Other saints mentioned feeling harassed by the seemingly constant onslaught of reporters. Liston commented, for example, that he was getting tired of ". . . them looking at us like we're a bunch of animals" (fieldnotes, April 29, 1973).

Members generally agreed that the persecution was a part of God's plan and part of the reason that God called His saints home. Prior to the deaths, there were many unresolved issues that threatened to split the church. Many felt that the deaths and the resultant persecution would check this process. As discussed in Chapter V, persecution and a sense of being a "separated people" are important mechanisms for the creation of a serpent-handling identity. Given the sense of persecution and the media coverage members tended to emphasize a we/they dichotomy which, for a time, promoted a strong cohesion and an identity as a community under siege.

As discussed in Chapter III, the deaths had considerable impact on the church with respect to factionalism, leadership conflict, and the meanings attributed to signs that "fail". For awhile, at least, the deaths seemed to instill a cautious pragmatism in some about relying on supernatural power. For example, when one of Jimmy's sons developed infectious hepatitis in December, 1973, his mother and another sister in the church took the sick child to a doctor despite the admonishments of some members that "the Lord could heal". They agreed with the principle that faith could heal, but were adamant in saying that ". . . we don't need any more deaths in the church" (fieldnotes, December 1973).

To this point in the discussion I have demonstrated that saints went about reporting on the deaths in ways that made them meaningful as part of a larger plan that originated with God. Although some in the community felt that the men should not have consumed the poison in the first place, there seemed to be little doubt that the men died in the faith serving God and were in a heavenly home. There seemed to be little question that the men died because they did not "live right" or "because they missed God's will" (transcription, December 1974). One notable exception to this was the interpretation given by an infrequent visitor of the church. This brother made the statement during a church service sometime in 1974 that he thought that Buford and Jimmy were in hell. His rationale for saying this derived from his own particular interpretation of anointing. From his perspective, if the brothers had had the anointing, they would not have died. As they died, they did not have the anointing (thus were not acting in the will of the Lord) and consequently were in hell. Although not all in the church view the anointing and the Scriptures uniformly, most did not share the visitor's pessimistic conclusions regarding the departed saints' fates (Most in the church felt that the brothers did indeed have the anointing, but the Lord caused the "hedge to be broken" for higher purposes). His pronouncement and his agressive manner antagonized many in the church (fieldnotes, November 28, 1974).

Case IX--This case deals with failure to cast demons out of a mentally retarded girl. My emphasis is not on exorcism per se, but on how the disconfirmation was managed and neogtiated. This failed attempt at exorcism created considerable controversy in the church and promoted factional conflict.

A girl who appeared to be mentally retarded was led up to the altar by her mother or aunt to have the devil that was causing her problems cast from her. After considerable effort by a number of brothers it became evident to all that the "demon" would not be routed and her condition would not be altered. In fact, the attempted exorcism seemed to agitate her. As described in my fieldnotes (July 2, 1972): ". . . The girl appeared to be panicking and swung out wildly as she sobbed, moaned, and screamed". As soon as the brothers abandoned their efforts of casting out the demon, Brother B. "took the pulpit" and initiated the debate that ensued (fieldnotes July 2, 1972):

> B. gave testimony and walked around the pulpit as he spoke. He told of how he had suffered last year when he was serpent-bit. . . He was sick for about five days and lost his job as a result. He hadn't really

> had the anointing then and thought that his powers were greater than they were--not unlike many of the brothers in that church. A man cannot take up serpents and especially not cast out devils without the anointing. One might reach down into the serpent box and do all right with little anointing and much faith and may be all right nine tenths of the time. But casting out devils is a different matter. One must have the anointing. Some brothers here may think they do, but they are wrong. There is too much self in it and not enough credit given to God. Without the anointing a man can do nothing. Witness the unsuccessful attempt of this evening. Now if I don't speak the truth just tell me. I am speaking the truth, am I not? (Yes from Brother W. and Brother P. in the amen corner. W. smiled when he said yes.) Now, I only get that type of anointing about once a year--where I know for a fact that I have full power to cast out devils. I can take up serpents more often, as you can get by on faith and not as much anointing . . . It is necessary to fast in order to cast out devils. (He was suggesting that brothers in the church 'hadn't paid the price'.)

(As an aside, it is interesting to note how B. utilized his account of serpent-bite for didactic purposes at hand.)

B. concluded his brief admonishment and was succeeded in the pulpit by an elderly brother whom many consider to be senile. The elderly brother attempted to read from the Bible but was interrupted by Brother W. who said that he had something to say first. (This is considered a bad breach of preaching etiquette.) W. said that (fieldnotes, July 2, 1972):

> . . . certain people are blessed with special powers--some can take up serpents, some can cast out devils. At that point, B. said to the people whom he had driven to church, 'come on, we're leaving'. As he was leaving, B. pointed at W. and shouted a correction to him saying that 'power is not in the self but comes through being anointed'. (Another breach of etiquette to interrupt a preacher who has the pulpit.) B. and his passengers then marched out of the church. W. responded by saying that if someone didn't agree with him they should tell him so, but he would never storm out of church because he didn't agree with someone.

At this point the service was dismissed abruptly and people congregated outside in the church yard to discuss the events of the evening. Someone asked, 'what happened to Brother B.? The reply was that 'he was given a straight dose of the gospel and couldn't take it'. Before B. drove off, he walked toward the groups of people and said that 'he wasn't going to have anything to do with a church that doesn't preach the truth'. Brother P. said to me that he hoped that the next time that I came to church they would "get better victory".

The next evening, Monday July 3, 1972, (at a revival service), Brother W. made the following points concerning the events of the preceeding service (fieldnotes):

> . . . Yesterday someone had said that he was a devil. I am not a devil, but I am a man. Just because I was anointed to take up serpents doesn't mean that I am a devil. A person can have nine spirits. . . Brothers and sisters are anointed with these different spirits, but no one that he knows of, except Jesus, had them all at one time. If a person hasn't been fasting and praying, they have no business to attempt to drive out devils. Such people were only causing interference and would hinder the Spirit. We have allowed people who didn't have the anointing and who hadn't fasted, participate. He could tell if a man hadn't fasted and was more concerned with eating. (Brother P. said, yes, we haven't been strict enough with this.) W. said that the person must have paid the price and have been anointed before he should be allowed to participate. People who haven't paid the price with respect to a certain gift should not be attempting to use it. Also, people who speak heresy shouldn't speak. People who come to church with hate and jealousy in their hearts should stay home. Some have asked Brother W. why he doesn't empty the hosptial beds and cure the sick. Because some of these people have their afflictions from God. Also, maybe he didn't have that anointing. A pastor can't be travelling all around evangelizing, but must guide his flock. An evangelist or prophet would do that. There were two freshly caught copperheads outside and he would handle them tomorrow night

> as he had the anointing to handle serpents. . . A church is a collection of many people; weak and strong, with various powers. No man has all of the power. One should not call one a devil because he uses one power and not another. A devil is a spirit, not a man.

Brother A. preached for awhile, making the point that (fieldnotes July 3, 1972):

> . . . Sometimes one can't heal because of the unrepented sins of the parents. He gave an example of a girl that he couldn't heal of deafness and dumbness because of her mother's sins. God puts afflictions on some. One must wait for the Word of God before knowing if a person can be healed or not. . .

Throughout this service saints affirmed what they believed about working in the signs, emphasizing that one must ". . . pay the price" before attempting to cast out demons or work in other signs. In effect, the service can be seen as a not so subtle denunciation of B.'s behavior and particular version of the meaning of anointing. It is noteworthy that B. also emphasized the notion that one must "pay the price". It appears that a number of B's points were adopted and then utilized to denounce him. In fact, as members' accounts proceeded from the general to a more specific condemnation of B. he ultimately was seen as being at least a partial cause of why the demon was not cast out of the girl. The following comments made by Brother P. illustrate the point (fieldnotes):

> . . . Brother P. talked about the retarded girl and said that she did have devils in her and once they were out, she would be all right. Also, he had felt the anointing to cast out devils last night, but felt interfered with by one who didn't and, therefore, he couldn't do it. (He also mentioned that his brother threatened to 'whup him', but he talked Don out of it and told him that he wasn't mad at the little girl, but at the devil in her.)

Brother B. stayed away from church services at The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name until July 28, 1972. The so called "demon possessed" girl attended the service on Monday, July 3, 1972 and to my knowledge has not been back to the church since then. Occasionally at services (in 1973-74) someone will make a passing reference to her, saying that they saw her in town and how pitiful she looked or, she needs those demons cast out of her.

The following summary from my fieldnotes of July 9, 1972 is apt:

> I got the feeling that the church has just weathered another crises in faith. . . There has been much soul searching and re-evaluation and defining of positions. I think that the issue is resolved for the time being. The overall mood seems to be one of caution, of being very sure that the anointing is present before working in a sign such as casting out demons. . .

In other words through the exorcism that failed and the resulting conflict, members arrived at a new awareness of the constraints of working in this particular sign--an awareness that tended to restrict its use. Since that incident, I have not witnessed a comparable attempt at casting out demons. I have observed low keyed attempts at casting out demons to effect healing, but nothing to rival the incident of July 2, 1972. This is not to suggest that exorcism is no longer a part of serpent-handling ideology, only that members approach it more cautiously and, perhaps as a result of their greater knowledge of its pitfalls, are much wiser and more skilled in its use. This is also not to suggest that a final solution to this potentially problematic realm was arrived at. Casting out demons, like everything else in the church is subject to ongoing interpretation and creation of meaning as action and reporting of action continually unfolds.

Case X--This case deals with the type of problems encountered by saints in speaking in tongues. Although instances of failure in this sign are less dramatic and less crucial than in some of the other signs it, nevertheless, provides a number of cases in which to examine how supernatural power is conceptualized and managed socially. This case not only looks at the negotiation of meaning, but also, at the variability and ambiguity in serpent-handlers' system of knowledge and how this is manipulated by saints in the ongoing assignment of meaning to their environment. As in other cases, this one also illustrates the conflict between individual power effected behavior and the social interpretation of appropriateness.

Specifically, this case involves an elderly saint's attempt to chastise members for neglecting to render interpretation of their glossolalia. In doing this, the saint attempted to force a number of people to interprete glossolalia that he uttered. Members appeared to be offended by his behavior. Considerable conflict and hard feelings resulted. The incident unfolded as follows (fieldnotes, July 26, 1972):

> . . . Brother W. spoke of speaking in tongues. . . It says in I Corinthians 14:27 that 'If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret'.

> Speaking in tongues was meant as a sign to non-believers, but some of the brothers and sisters in the church spend most of their church time speaking in tongues. He said to Sister E., you once said that you could interpret tongues, didn't you? She said that she sometimes can. He told her to come up to the altar as he was going to speak in tongues and wanted it interpreted. (E. looked embarassed and started to move toward the front, hesitated, and told the brother that she did not want to go up there.) He said, stay in your place then. (Sister L. and Sister E. exchanged glances as did L. with a sister in the back.) W. then asked if anyone else could interpret tongues. J. said that he could sometimes and P. indicated that he also could sometimes. (P., J. and other saints appeared to be displeased with the brother's behavior. P., especially looked annoyed.)
>
> Following his characteristic jerking and hand waving motion W. broke into a glossolalia utterance. (It was not the short, punctuated variety usually heard at the church, but rather like he was speaking in longer phrases or sentences as in an African language. He spoke for only a couple of minutes.) He then called on Sister E. for an interpretation. She said that she could not interpret it. (She looked impatient with him.) Neither J. nor P. could make any literal or interpretive sense of the brother's tongues. (Brother W. seemed displeased and handed the microphone over to P. (who appeared to be giving strong non verbal cues to W. to terminate his performance.)
>
> . . . Brother P. then made a special point that Wednesdays were especially set aside for young preachers to gain experience as this might be their only chance.

After this, Brother J. took the microphone and presented the following discussion of the meaning of speaking in tongues. He emphasized that what he had to say was not directed against Brother W. He only wanted to clarify the issue (fieldnotes July 26, 1972):

> . . . The passage says that 'they shall speak with new tongues' and that in all probability this could not be interpreted. It was meant as a sign to

> demonstrate to non-believers. On the day of Pentecost, the Apostles were given the gift of other language tongues to enable them to carry the gospel around the world. Sometimes men educated in languages can understand these tongues, but this is a special gift. (This is distinguished from understanding the spiritual meaning of an utterance.)

When Brother J. finished the above lesson, Brother D. indicated that he had a few words to speak. He enjoined people not to spread bad things about the church. Brother S. then said that he wanted to speak. He mentioned that he usually did not speak, but felt that he had to under the circumstances. Earlier in the service a debate had developed between W., J., and P. over the meaning of 'fornication'. . .) Brother S. stated that:

> . . . if there were sinners present they would probably walk out because of the brothers not being in agreement and confusing the issue. The brothers need to get their stories straight before preaching. The church needs study workshops on Scriptures to get a standard interpretation. He said that maybe he was out of line bringing it up, but that is how he saw it. (The brothers in the amen corner indicated that he had the right to say it, but all looked uncomfortable and put on the spot. P. looked angry and at one point kept waving his Bible, saying that, it is all in the Scriptures.)

Brother D. then jumped up asking if he preached anything that was not the truth. P. and the others in the amen corner answered by saying, "no brother D., you preached your Scripture correct." Brother W. then stood up and said rather harshly to Sister E., "You said you could interpret tongues but you couldn't interpret what I said". (L. and E. and others all exchanged glances.) He then went on to say that Brother J. or no one else there could interpret what he had said. P. almost grabbed the microphone from him saying that we should read the Scriptures more before we start to speak. He then said that it was late and the service had to close. After a song the service was dismissed. Brother D. left in a huff and general confusion prevailed.

In this case, a number of issues proved problematic. In effect, the variable interpretation of the Scripture concerning tongues was the root cause of the problem. Specifically over the distinction between "new tongues" and "other language tongues". Thus, for members who adhered to this distinction Brother W's emphasis on interpretation was superfluous in this case. Similarly, many in the congregation seemed to find his total performance to be inappropriate. In a group that emphasizes the leadership of the Spirit, W's version was unacceptable. By demanding that people render an interpretation of his tongues he assumed that interpretations could be rendered on command without the visible intervention of the Spirit. When interpretations are made at the church, it is usually quite spontaneous and manifesting evidence of spirit possession. Moreover, W's glossolalia appeared quite mechanical in comparison to the more usual (for that church) spontaneous tongue speaking. Brother S., originally from a Baptist or related background, admonished brothers to arrive at a standard interpretation of the Scriptures. This is a difficult achievement in a group where meaning and applicability of the Bible is largely dependent on members' personal mystical experiences and ongoing negotiation of meaning.

POWER AND DECISION-MAKING IN EVERYDAY LIFE

As established in the preceeding chapter, saints' concepts around power have considerable import in a number of areas of daily living. To illustrate how this utilization of power can prove problematic, one case will be examined briefly. This case depicts the type of problem that can arise when saints rely on prophetic dreams in decision-making. Specifically a prophetic dream inspired the saint to violate rules of serpent-handling etiquette. The members's dilemma is discussed. As in many other cases, the central problem faces by the serpent-handler is to reconcile individual mystical experiences with appropriate social behavior.

Case--The assistant pastor of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name acquired a particularly vicious Western Diamondback Rattlesnake (that he named Rudolf) from a travelling snake exhibit that passed through the community in the summer of 1973. A couple of weeks after acquiring it, the brother shot and killed the snake, which another brother had asked to handle. This action violated at least two commonly held informal etiquette rules of the community. One, serpent-handlers generally do not believe in killing snakes, as no serpent is too vicious for the anointing of God to handle. Two, saints consider it wrong to refuse a serpent to an anointed person or to take steps to prevent him from handling it.

The assistant pastor claimed that his behaivor was prompted by a dream that he had had the previous year in which a snake with Rudolf's distinctive markings viciously attacked and killed a serpent-handler whom he had not seen before. Shortly after acquiring Rudolf, the brother recognized that it was indeed the snake in his dream and he also recognized the snake's potential victim (an accomplished serpent-handler who had only recently started attending the church). To complicate matters, the man in question was an avid and enthusiastic snake-handler who took up serpents whenver he had the opportunity. (This followed from his belief that he stayed anointed twenty-four hours a day and could engage in the practice at anytime.) On one occasion this serpent-handler visited the assistant pastor's home and expressed interest in handling Rudolf. However, the assistant pastor claimed that he could not find the key to the padlocked serpent-box.

The following excerpts from my field notes (July 26, 1973) describe the assistant pastor's feelings on the situation:

> . . . The assistant pastor and I carried Rudolf into the back yard and he shot the snake in the head, through the screen of the serpent-box with a "22" . . . He seemed reluctant to kill Rudolf and figured that if it were not for the dream that he probably would not have done it. It hurt him to kill almost anything, even 'mean old Rudolf', but he figured that it was better to kill it than to have this prophetic dream materialize. He said that he would have liked to get the anointing over Rudolf, but figured that if he ever was anointed to take up a particular snake that he could probably never bring himself to kill it. . .

The saint's killing of the snake created a problem of credibility. The insinuation could be made by saint and sinner alike that the brother doubted the power of anointing in general or doubted that he had the ability to handle this particularly vicious snake. As church members often make decision based on dreams or visions, the assistant pastor's claim was plausible (at least to other saints). However, members assess and interpret the merits of particular cases based on their background knowledge of the situation. In this particular case, the saint's claims were taken seriously as members knew him as a person who consistently received strong anointing to handle serpents, had a thorough knowledge of the Bible, and who lived a Holiness lifestyle. This is not to suggest that a general consensus was arrived at, only that the issue did not find its way into sermons and did not develop into a major issue in the church. Its discussion remained at the level of insinuation in private conversations between saints. Like most other issues in the church dealing with power, a final resolution was not reached and the incident was kept alive through the telling and retelling of accounts.

This incident proved embarrassing to the assistant pastor and others in the church in their dealings with non-believing friends, relatives, and neighbors. The assistant pastor's next door neighbor had heard the gun shots and came outside to see what had taken place. The saint confided to me that he hoped that none would hear the gun shots as this would be difficult to explain to non-believers. Not long after Rudolf was killed, the saint's brother-in-law stopped in for a visit and asked to see Rudolf. The assistant pastor explained that it had been shot and why this was necessary. The brother-in-law said that the snake was shot because the saint was afraid of it, suggesting that serpent-handlers only used snakes that were sluggish and docile.

Incidents like this can do considerable damage to serpent-handlers' performance claims. For this reason alone, some in the church remained critical of this act, even though the validity of prophetic dreams was not at issue.

ANALYSIS AND CHAPTER CONCLUSION

One goal of this ethnography is to isolate underlying premises of the religion from which behavior and interpretations of behavior are generated. As abstracted from the analysis of the case studies, I am suggesting that The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name is generated and organized about four non-negotiable premises:

1. The basic premise from which the other organizing rules are derived is that All power in the universe resides in God.

2. Establishing a relationship between people and power and giving this power (and God) meaning and immediacy is the fact that people have access of this power as specified in the King James Bible.

3. Delineating the potentialities of that power, power or anointing is channeled to men through various administrations that correlate roughly with specific works.

4. Providing the system with flexibility and a logical basis for members' negotiations:

(a) "It's impossible for you to get hurt in the anointing of God. . . but when the hedge is broken the serpent will bite";

(b) "God's Spirit will always follow His Word. . . but you can't dictate (or fully understand) to the Spirit . . . as all power in the universe resides in God. . ."

These four premises conform to Gasking's (1955:432, in Mehan and Wood 1975:9) notion of "incorrigible propositions", which:

> . . . you would never admit to be false whatever happens; it therefore does not tell you what happens . . . The truth of an incorrigible proposition. . . is compatible with any and every conceivable state of affairs. (For example: whatever is your experience on counting, it is still true that 7 + 5 = 12).

In essence, such propositions may be seen as "unquestioned and unquestionable axioms" (Mehan and Wood 1975:9). From an ethnomethodological perspective, incorrigible faith ". . . is not so much a faith about a fact in the world as a faith in the facility of the world itself" (Ibid.). Applying this principle to serpent-handlers: no matter what the outcome of particular performances, saints would not deny the existence of God, the validity of the Bible, or the notoin that power operates in saints' lives. Crucial to this is the fourth premise mentioned above, which avoids intolerable contradiction.

It is my thesis that members' acceptance of these premises forms the basis for cognitive sharing at The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name. Members' acceptance of these presuppositions is not automatic neither is it unproblematic; but the validity of these presuppositions is not debated. I am not suggesting that these rules are behaviorally predictive. Rather, they are essential for "making sense" of the diverse, and apparently contradictory, phenomenal world of serpent-handlers.

As shown in the cases presented in this chapter, when power apparently fails saints rely on (as well as the essential "slipperiness" of the system) what Evans-Pritchard (1937:330) called "secondary elaborations". Through such elaborations saints may account for apparent disconfirmations, blaming poor timing, divisive spirits, lack of faith, and a host of other variables; without questioning their invariable premises.[7]

Polanyi (1964:287) arrived at similar conclusions in looking at Evans-Pritchard's work on Azande witchcraft. He states that:

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[7] Cognitive dissonance theory may also be used to account for members' handling of a disconfirmation of beliefs. I purposely did not use this approach for a number of reasons. Primarily, the use of cognitive dissonance theory is inconsistent with the goals of ethnographic analysis specified in this thesis. My aim is to discover members' organizing principles, not to impose arbitrarily a uniformist theory derived from the observer's assumptive world. In addition, the use of cognitive dissonance theory poses a number of methodological problems. How do we establish that a person is experiencing dissonance, let along an entire group! Or, following the line of thought presented in this study, how can we establish in a number of cases that a disconfirmation has indeed occurred? (It is possible that given the logical constructs of members they are unaware of disconfirmations seen by the analyst.) For a further critique of dissonance theory see Birckhead (1971). For an example of a fruitful ethnographic applicatin of cognitive dissonance theory, see Sanada and Norbeck (1975).

> Our formally declared beliefs can be held to be true in the last resort only because of our logically anterior acceptance of a particular set of terms, from which all our references are constructed.

In essence, Polyani is suggesting a generative model for explaining members' ability to deal with apparent disconfirmations of belief. Specifically, from core principles of knowledge, members (Azande, serpent-handlers, or academics) are able to elaborate an almost infinite range of explanations.

Polanyi conceptualizes a system based on secondary elaborations as "epicyclical" in that it can supply ". . .a reserve of subsidiary explanations. . . which will cover almost any conceivable eventuality, however embarassing this may appear at first sight" (Ibid., p. 291). For Polanyi, the success of such systems in explaining contradiction is attributable to their circularity. All explanations refer back to apriori underlying premises. Explanations that threaten to break this circle are inadmissible and are converted into the logic of the belief system. (This is exemplified by Evans-Pritchard's attempts to confront the Azande with principles of Western logic. Evans-Pritchard 1937:319).

Finally, Polanyi (op. cit., p. 291) attributes the persistence of epicyclical systems to members' penchant for handling logical objections to the system one at a time. Specifically:

> . . . a new conception . . . could be established only by a whole series of relevant instances, and such evidence cannot accumulate in the minds of people if each of them is disregarded in its turn for lack of the concept which would lend significance to it.

As already emphasized, Polanyi's concept of the "epicyclical system" has considerable relevance to the study of serpent-handling. For the purposes of this study, however, Polanyi's notion is seen as being relatively static.[8] He (Ibid., p. 287) notes, for example, that ". . . Azande culture provides a number ready explanations", but does not make explicit members' interactional practices for making these "ready explanations" emerge. Similarly, Polanyi does not account for variability in explanations or what this variability might mean to the group as a whole.

In looking at serpent-handling, we need to extend Polanyi's static model to include ways that saints negotiate the meanings of events and the implications that this has for the viability of the community. One way of approaching this is through an examination of saints' decision-making concerning the meaning of an event specifically, a case of serpent-bite. Figure III depicts the logical possibilities in a case of serpent-bite death.[9]

This model is an extremely simplified version of serpent-handlers' decision-making, showing the junctures where choice must be made, i.e., negotiated and debated. This basic model, however, is capable of generating a considerably more

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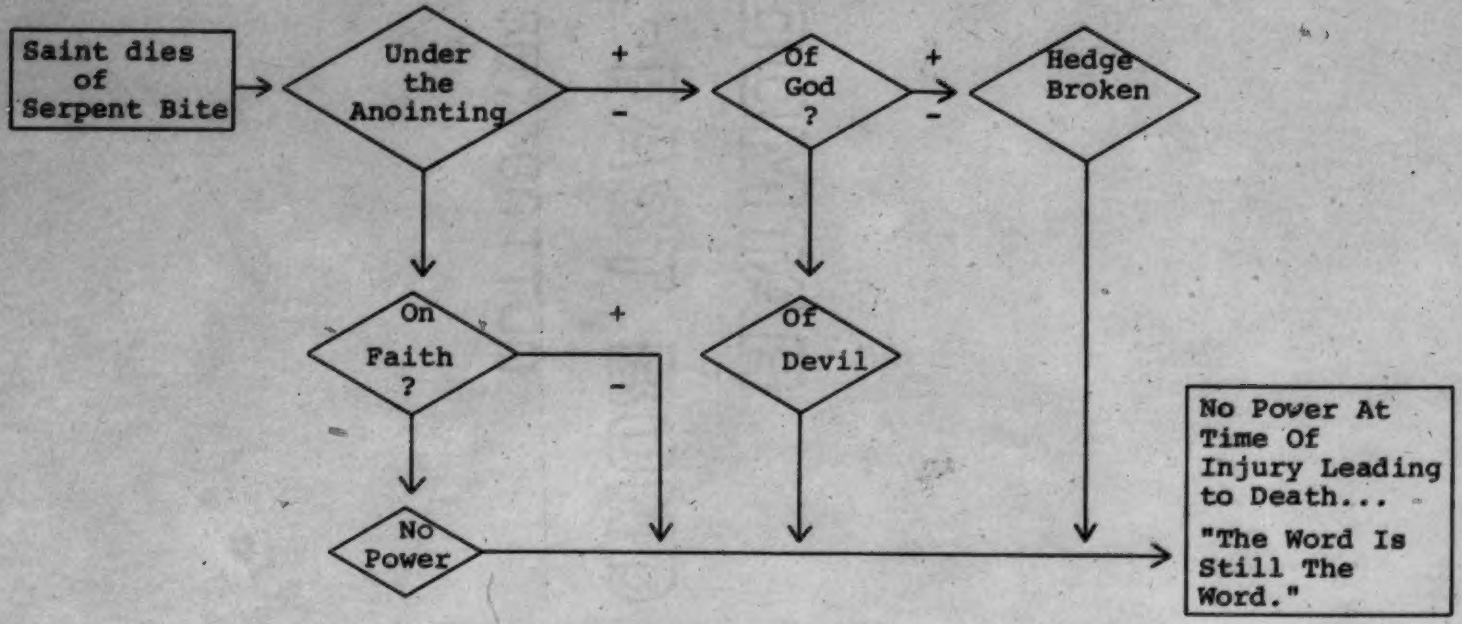
[8] This is not surprising as Polanyi did not collect the Azande data in the field but had only the reports of Evans-Pritchard to rely on.

[9] The type of Decision model used here is adapted from the work of Geoghagen 1971; and Keesing 1971.

FIGURE III

DECISION-MAKING--SERPENT-BITE DEATH


Saint dies of Serpent Bite
Under the Anointing
+
-
Of God ?
+
-
Hedge Broken
On Faith ?
+
-
Of Devil
No Power
No Power At Time Of Injury Leading to Death...
"The Word Is Still The Word."

complex decision-making matrix. But, in the end, no matter what paths are taken by negotiators the outcome remains and the basic premises of the religion are logically reaffirmed. Simply, a saint decides whether or not the deceased person was working the sign with anointing power. If the answer is yes, and it is determined that the anointing was from God, then it follows that the anointing departed or attenuated (the hedge was broken). He would then decide whether the hedge was broken by God, by the saint, by the devil, or by factors in the environment. Once this has been ascertained, any number of possible explanations within this category are available.

Saints have developed a large number of distinctions within the "by saint" and "by God" explanations of why the hedge was broken. On both an empirical and theoretical level these two categoires appear to be of particular importance to the affirmation of the underlying premises of the religion; specifically, that man can and does receive power from God and, that "you can't get hurt in the anointing of God". Figure IV outlines some of the reasons saints give for why the hedge is broken.

In the above cases no matter what the outcome of saints negotiations the outcome of the simplified decision model (Figure III) is replicated--i.e., the Word is still the Word and the truth assumptions of the religion remain unaltered.

FIGURE IV

HEDGE IS BROKEN

Environment

1. divisive spirit
2. distraction
3. Devil

By God

A. Special Purpose
    1. teach saint
    2. teach sinner
    3. heal saint
    4. unite God's people
    5. spread gospel
    6. only God knows
    7. to be determined
    8. . . .

B. To Fulfill Prophecy

C. Can't Know In Carnal Mind

D. Don't Question God

E. Time Up, Call Saint Home, (saint gave life for church)

F. . . .

By Saint

A. Break Rule Of Technique Or Belief
    1. weak anointing
    2. weak faith
    3. timing
    4. meaning of sign
    5. same sign twice
    6. before same audience
    7. vain spirit
    8. sinful life
    9. wrong sign
    10. lost faith, saw doctor
    11. Ignorance
    12. Listened to Devil
    13. . . .

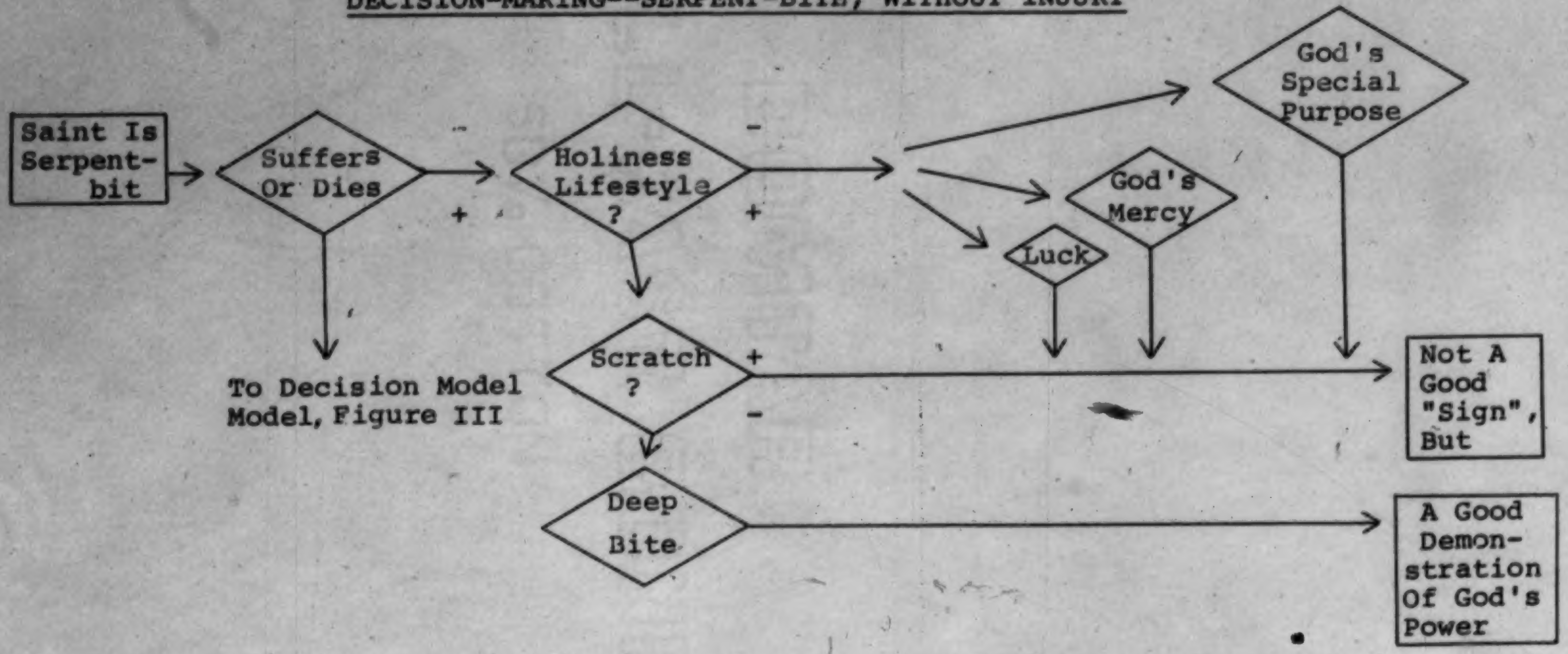
One final example of saints' decision-making will be examined to demonstrate further the type of secondary and tertiary elaborations negotiated by members. In this case, a member has been serpent-bit but does not suffer. If the person had manifested visible symptoms such as swelling, nausea, or passing out, saints' will (all things being equal) work within a decision-making matrix similar to the one outlined in Figure III. Members logically have the following decisions to make in their negotiation of the meaning(s) of the incident. Although the particulars are different from those presented in the previous case, the final underlying conclusions remain the same--that the Word is still the Word and the premises of the faith validated.

In using the decision models I do not purport to account for all possible eventualities. The model depicts secondary and negotiable elaborations of saints' basic premises, invariable rules, or incorrigible propositions. Consequently, it is recursive and does not represent a finite and highly bounded domain. Whatis of interest here is that no matter what secondary elaborations saints rely on, the basic structure of the model remains unaltered, i.e., the underlying premises are affirmed and reinforced.

The apparent simplicity of the decision models masks the complexities of saints' negotiations and interactional work for making the meaning(s) of secondary elaborations emerge. Consequently, the decision models as used here are capable

FIGURE V

DECISION-MAKING--SERPENT-BITE, WITHOUT INJURY


Saint Is Serpent-bit
Suffers Or Dies
-
+
To Decision Model Model, Figure III
Holiness Lifestyle ?
-
+
Luck
God's Mercy
God's Special Purpose
Scratch ?
+
-
Deep Bite
Not A Good "Sign", But
A Good Demonstration Of God's Power

of explicating the logical structure of saints' negotiations, but not of predicting what specific elaborations saints will employ. This is consistent with the goals of ethnographic analysis introduced in Chapter I.[10]

The goals of this ethnography vary somewhat from those articulated by Geoghegan (1971:5-6), who posited that the goal of ethnographic analysis is not only to account for what: ". . . a native actor does under certain circumstances, but also how he decides what to do". To achieve this ideal, ". . . we have to know what information he is operating with and how it is being processed" (*ibid*.). This view rests on a number of assumptions about the nature of cognition in general and information processing in particular. Specifically, (*ibid*., p. 29):

> This commitment involves such fundamental notions as the itemization of information (i.e., the cognitive representation of information as discrete units and not as continuously variable magnitudes), the sequential processing of information, the tendency toward efficient cognitive systems, limitations on the amount of information that can be processed at one time, recoding, contrast between the states of an assessment . . ., and so on. . .

It is instructive to note ways in which serpent-handlers' assignment of meaning or decision-making departs from Geoghegan's assumptions. In seeking to isolate how saints process information we are not dealing with a lineal information model.[11] Units of information--i.e., "suffering/not suffering", "anointed/not anointed", "on faith/not on faith", "Holiness lifestyle", "by God/by the Devil", etc.--all have non material referents and are validated by personal experience and group negotiation. For example, what constitutes visible symptoms of suffering and degree of suffering is variable--there being no once-and-for-all definition. Decisions about what really happened are based on an enormous reserve of background (perhaps "logically" irrelevant) information. In the case of serpent-bite with suffering, members' background knowledge concerning the individual and his behavior in the past; his lifestyle, personality, position with respect to factions in the church, how well he presents his case may all effect the diagnosis.

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[10] Specifically, Frake (1964b:133) states that: "The model of an ethnographic statement is not: 'if a person is confronted with stimulus X, he will do Y,' but 'if a person is in situation X, performance Y will be judged appropriate by native actors'".

The secondary negotiable elaborations do not arrange themselves logically in neat and predictable sequences, nor in an invariant hierarchiacal structure based on rules of inclusion/exclusion. For example, "good" and "evil" do not appear to be of equal valence in this system: the Devil may act, but only at God's will (see Birckhead 1975:9-11).

Decisions made are not final. Saints are capable of (and comfortable about) changing and reformulating decisions as new information presents itself, often in prophecy, visions or dreams. The fact that this is an oral rather than written tradition contributes to this open-endedness.

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[11] See Barth (1966) for a discussion of decision-making and the generative model.

A final point not fully accounted for in a decision-making matrix is the belief that God can miraculously intervene, the rule being, that the spirit can make what appears to be not obvious, obvious. In other words, the spirit of God serves as a rule for breaking or rewriting rules (for the purposes at hand). As is shown in Figure IV (when the hedge is broken), this sort of explanation is used frequently. By involving God's will, judgement can be suspended, or an old decision can be flatly contradicted; and, the sense of being a community with access to power is not weakened but reaffirmed. This is crucial to our understanding of saints' management of apparent disconfirmations and ambiguities.

Although saints' decision-making is not predictable or totally accountable in terms of either/or junctures, decisions appear to be made against a background of non-negotiable rules. The non-negotiable rules establish the logical basis out of which a wide range of interpretations (eg. secondary elaborations) can be generated. In other words, in the end, saints' negotiations and decision-making in cases where power is problematic all reach the same underlying, invariable conclusions--"the Word is still the Word. . . all power in the universe resides in God". What is interesting is saints' interactional practices for making obvious the underlying premises of the religion. The implications of this for the ongoing creation of a community of saints will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis I have focused on ways in which members of a congregation of Southern Appalachian serpent-handlers create meaning for their practices, a distinctive identity as apostles and saints, and a sense of community. My central proposition has been that meaning, identity, and community are not fixed or inherent qualities, but emerge out of members' interactions.

The theoretical approach, technical language, and philosophical basis of this study were derived from ethno-semantics, socio-linguistics, transformational-generative linguistics, and ethnomethodology. Used in combination, these ideas, assumptions, and procedures raised pertinent questions and suggested methods and concepts applicable to the study.

Although the study combines the perspectives of a number of disciplines or sub-disciplines, they share a common concern with the complex question of meaning--how it is created, generated, managed, negotiated, and sustained. The general procedure is to probe beneath the varied phenomenal world to seek and interpret underlying invariances that generate and organize behavior and lead to interpretations of behavior by the actors.

An eclectic approach was used because the ideas and methods of no single scholarly field seemed adequate for organizing and interpreting my data on serpent-handling. the study began from an ethnosemantic perspective, but I found that this approach lacked vocabulary and methods suitable for dealing with change and variability of behavior. Through focusing on serpent-handling's terminological systems I was able to isolate the salient semantic domain of supernatural power. This provided a starting point from which to approach the community and to posit underlying organizing principles. Given this concern with underlying invariances, I found Chomsky's concept of a generative grammar to be useful. It provided an analogy for conceptualizing at the level of a community a limited number of incorrigible propositions, invariable rules, or non-negotiable premises that underlie and generate a seemingly limiteless number of negotiable or variable interpretations. This established the basic structure against which the meaning of members' negotiations could be viewed. It is at this level of social negotiations of derived rules and premises that much of the work of creating and sustaining a community is conducted. Although the incorrigible propositions are basic to and generate community interaction, they do not provide specific instructions for their applications in varied situations. This must be negotiated and arrived at by members.

In conceptualizing the meaning and structure of members' negotiation my perspective was derived from ethnomethodology. Ethnomethodology, although not ordinarily applied at a community level, provided a valuable tool for "making sense of" members' negotiation practices and for focusing on the constructed, problematic nature of social meaning. From this perspective, it was seen that meaning is constituted situationally rather than emerging from fixed or objective standards. Specifically, I suggested that through members' analyzing and reporting on the events of their social world, a sense of the logical and experiential reality of that world is created and sustained. With regard to serpent-handlers, I maintained that through their accounting practices the facticity of supernatural power is established and sustained.

Finally, the socio-linguistic concept of the speech community was used to emphasize the larger linkages and fluidity of a serpent-handling group. I found this to be a useful way of focusing on community definition, interaction and identity.

The basic organization of the thesis emphasized its underlying focus. Although chapters two through six provided historical, socio-economic, and social organizational background information and established the context for my analysis of supernatural power in chapters seven and eight; they also focused on the community as a product of members' practices. The specific emphasis here was on members' accounts.

Chapter II located serpent-handling historically. Two contrasting perspectives were explicated. History was viewed lineally, as traditionally conceived by social scientists and historians. This was contrasted with members' religious interpretations of their history. It was shown that saints mythically telescope history, thereby linking the present with the Apostolic era. Following from this, history was viewed as a resource or means of community creation. Specifically, members' thaumaturgical expectations were created and justified, as well as their sense of being saints and apostles.

Chapter III focused on the origin and development of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name, and on what I labelled members' "documentary practices". Besides accounting for the prosaic and spectacular events of a serpent-handling community, members' practices of preserving and creating documentation of their community activities was focused on. This is an important point for the researcher to grasp, for at the level of analyzing the past of one community, it was demonstrated that much of the available historical documentation is a direct or indirect result of members' practices. It was further demonstrated that through these practices members establish wide ties outside of the religious community as well as a sense of the community as an important (newsworthy) production.

Chapter IV focused on the socio-economic situation of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name, and provided a perspective on serpent-handling and society. Not only was saints' socio-economic position established, but it was shown that saints' interpretations of of their class position may be seen as a mythical construction. Specifically, in their accounts, members portrayed the religion as having a much wider constituency justified from the analyst's perspective.

Chapter V defined the notion of a community of saints and explored aspects of serpent-handlers' identity as a "separated people". The community was defined as being problematic and emergent. It was also seen as a community within communities--within a larger secular context, and situated within a larger religious network. Following from this, identity and identity maintenance were examined. It was shown that although saints in general espouse separateness as an ideal, its exact meaning and achievement are open to interpretation and negotiation.

Chapter VI accounted for aspects of the church's social and activity structure. The fluid nature of role and role playing, authority and leadership, social control, and social structure was established and analyzed. This chapter also explored the importance of saints' concepts of supernatural power in generating and organizing religious activity. It was shown that the King James Bible provides the basic guidelines for proper church organization and the work of "the spirit" in the church. The Bible does not provide, however, specific instructions for members' role playing or for the implementation of ideal structure and organization. As throughout the study, it was emphasized that this emerges through ongoing interaction. The problematic aspects of leadership and social organization was demonstrated.

Chapter VII provided an overview of saints' concepts of supernatural power. It was demonstrated that the domain of power is complex and provides considerable flexibility and ambiguity. This chapter also established some of the basic ground rules and rules of etiquette for power effected performances. This discussion was organized around saints' concepts and saints' accounts about the nature of power.

Finally, Chapter VIII presented a number of cases that focused on the problematic aspect of saints' concepts of supernatural power. Three categories of events were examined: (1) Power and Preaching; (2) When Signs Fail; and, (3) Power And Decision Making In Everyday Life. In presenting these cases, four concerns were emphasized: (1) the translation of individual ecstatic experiences into appropriate social behavior; (2) the negotiation of meaning; (3) variability of explanations; and, (4) members accounting practices. This chapter concluded with a theoretical analysis of saints' negotiated decision-making about the meaning(s) of various power effected activities. In this analysis, what I consider to be the four invariable premises of the religion were examined, and the application of the generative model with regard to saints' interpretations was explicated.

Throughout this thesis I have focused on the problematic nature of life in a serpent-handling community. The specific focus has been on members' ongoing negotiations of meaning. A number of examples and cases (primarily involving saints' concepts of supernatural power) of members' accounts and negotiations have been examined. I have argued that meaning must be viewed as unstable, situated, open to negotiation and reinterpretation--in flux.

A number of questions can be raised regarding the implications and applications of my findings: one, are the findings applicable to serpent-handling churches in general; two, what relationship do members' negotiation of meanings have in the maintenance of the church; and, three, does my approach have implications for an understanding of social life in general?

With regard to the application of my findings to serpent-handling in general, a number of points should be made. This is an extremely difficult question to generalize on, owing to a paucity of data. Although a number of serpent-handling churches have been studied by researchers, most studies have glossed over or neglected entirely, the question of meaning. From available evidence I am suggesting that the processes that I described and analyzed as operative in The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name are applicable to other congregations. It is possible, however, that The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name represents a somewhat extreme case. Specifically, it might be reasonable to argue that issues that prove problematic for this relatively youthful congregation might not create the same degree of difficulty for more established churches. However, many of the problems faced by members of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name can be seen as being inherent to the religion's belief and activity system. All serpent-handling congregations, by virtue of their belief in the efficacy of supernatural power, encounter similar difficulties in translating the individual's mystical experiences into appropriate social action. This may be seen as serpent-handling's underlying contradiction. To adequately answer this question, however, further research needs to be undertaken at a number of different serpent-handling congregations, with emphasis given to the dimensions of group life examined in this study. Considerable variability exists within the larger serpent-handling movement and it would be useful to examine ways in which varied groups attempt to reconcile the individual/group contradiction.

In looking at the role of negotiations in the maintenance of the church, the following conclusions are suggested. It was shown in Chapter VIII, that negotiations of the meanings of events are generated from and relate back to, four non-negotiable premises or invariable rules. These rules or premises were seen as forming the shared ideological basis of the community. Saints' acceptance of these premises seems to be dependant largely on the conversion experience. This is not to suggest that if questioned, saints would list the four invariable premises. Rather, these premises are made evident by saints, referred back to, and continually reinforced through power-effected experiences and through the ongoing negotiation of the social meaning of those experiences. These premises regarding members' acquisition of power are of great interest to saints. What I am suggesting, is that negotiations and interpretations derived from the underlying premises provide the basis for, and generate social interaction. This is extremely important because without the resultant activities, the concept of saint would be meaningless.

In arriving at four non-negotiable premises, I do not mean to imply that saints are slaves to their culture or frozen in their actions. Rather, I see the open-endedness and flexibility of the system as promoting considerable creativity and contributing to the ongoing viability of the community of saints.

Finally, this work is not conclusive, nor does it exhaust all avenues of analysis. What I am suggesting and have attempted to demonstrate throughout this thesis is the fluid, negotiated nature of social life. The analysis of a small serpent-handling congregation poses theoretical and philosophical questions which have implications for the study of social life in general.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

A SERPENT-HANDLING LEXICON

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A SERPENT-HANDLING LEXICON

Throughout this thesis I have included a number of terms and phrases used by saints. The meanings of the more important items are provided in this brief lexicon.

Amen Corner--This refers to the right hand corner of the church, adjacent to the pulpit. A bench and chairs are placed here for preachers to sit in during church services. The name is derived from the fact that preachers often shout out "amen" during spirited sermons and testimonies. (see diagram)

Anointing-- This refers to the power of God that is received by members to perform supernatural signs of holiness, such as serpent-handling, to aid in the ministry of the church, and to aid saints in daily life. Power, victory, anointing power, in the spirit, got the spirit, (Holy Ghost), are used as equivalent expressions of possessing anointing or being anointed.

Backslide-- This means to revert back to a life of sin, after one has been converted.

Brother-- A term of reference and address in the church. This referent may apply to male saints, Christians, members, or friends of the church. (I was referred to as Brother Jimmy. . .) Conversely, Sister is a term of reference and address applicable to females in the church (members, Christians, friends of the church, etc.).

Carnal mind--This refers to thinking or reasoning that is not inspired by spiritual concerns. This referent is contrasted with spiritual mind, or thinking that is inspired by God or motivated by religious concerns.

Christian--	Is often used as synonymous with serpent-handling saint (or perhaps other fundamentalist). Term usually not applied to members of mainline protestant denominations. The implication here is that Christian is a state that is maintained through performance rather than mere membership.
Converted--	Refers to the process whereby sinners are transformed into saints or Christians. One can speak of the conversion experience, which implies the experiential aspects discussed in this study.
Evangelist--	Preachers in the church whose ministry includes travelling to various congregations to hold revivals or to preach.
Footwashing--	Refers to rite in the church where members of the same sex wash one anothers feet. This is done to instill humility and to re-enact the Last Supper where foot washing is said to have taken place.
Free Love--	An orientation within some serpent-handling congregations that posits that members who are in the Spirit will not lust in the carnal mind. Consequently, brothers and sisters kiss one another during services, embrace, and dance together in the Spirit. Embracing, kissing, or dancing in the Spirit (with one of the opposite sex) is strictly prohibited at The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name.
Hedge--	Members believe that when they receive the anointing power they are surrounded by a protective hedge. As long as the hedge remains, it is felt that injury will not occur.
Holy Kiss--	Male members greet one another by hugging and kissing on the neck.
Jesus Name (Jesus Only)--	Jesus Name congregations (derogatorily known as Jesus Only) baptize, and end prayers in "the name of Jesus" rather than in the name of the Trinity. Members of The Holiness Church Of God In Jesus Name believe that the name of Jesus encompasses the rest of the Trinity. See Trinitarian.
Laying on of hands--	Refers to members placing their hands on the head and shoulders of sick saints who are being prayed for.

Lord's Supper--A Communion rite that consists of brothers' breaking unleavened bread together, and consuming a small quantity of pure grape wine. This usually accompanies foot washing.

Mourner's Bench--The bench or chairs at the foot of the pulpit. The name is derived from the fact that repentant sinners usually pray for forgiveness with their heads resting on this bench. (See diagram)

Preacher-- A male in the church who has gone through an informal ordination ceremony, received a credential card, and who is recognized as capable of proclaiming the Gospel (preaching).

Saint-- One who has been "born again" through the conversion experience and baptism (of water and of the Spirit), and who lives a Holiness lifestyle. Can refer to either male or female, but is often used as equivalent to "apostle" (saints and apostles). In this sense, it is a referent pertaining to males. Saints may be contrasted to "sinners" or, those who are not saved (who have not been converted, baptized, and who do not live a Holiness lifestyle).

Saved-- This refers to a person's soul. Saved indicates that the soul has gained eternal reward in heaven. This contrasts with damned, or earning a place in hell. Saved, as used by some, can also refer to the saint's condition after repenting and "living right". Thus, one might ask, "have you been saved"?, the implication being that repentance and "living right" will insure salvation.

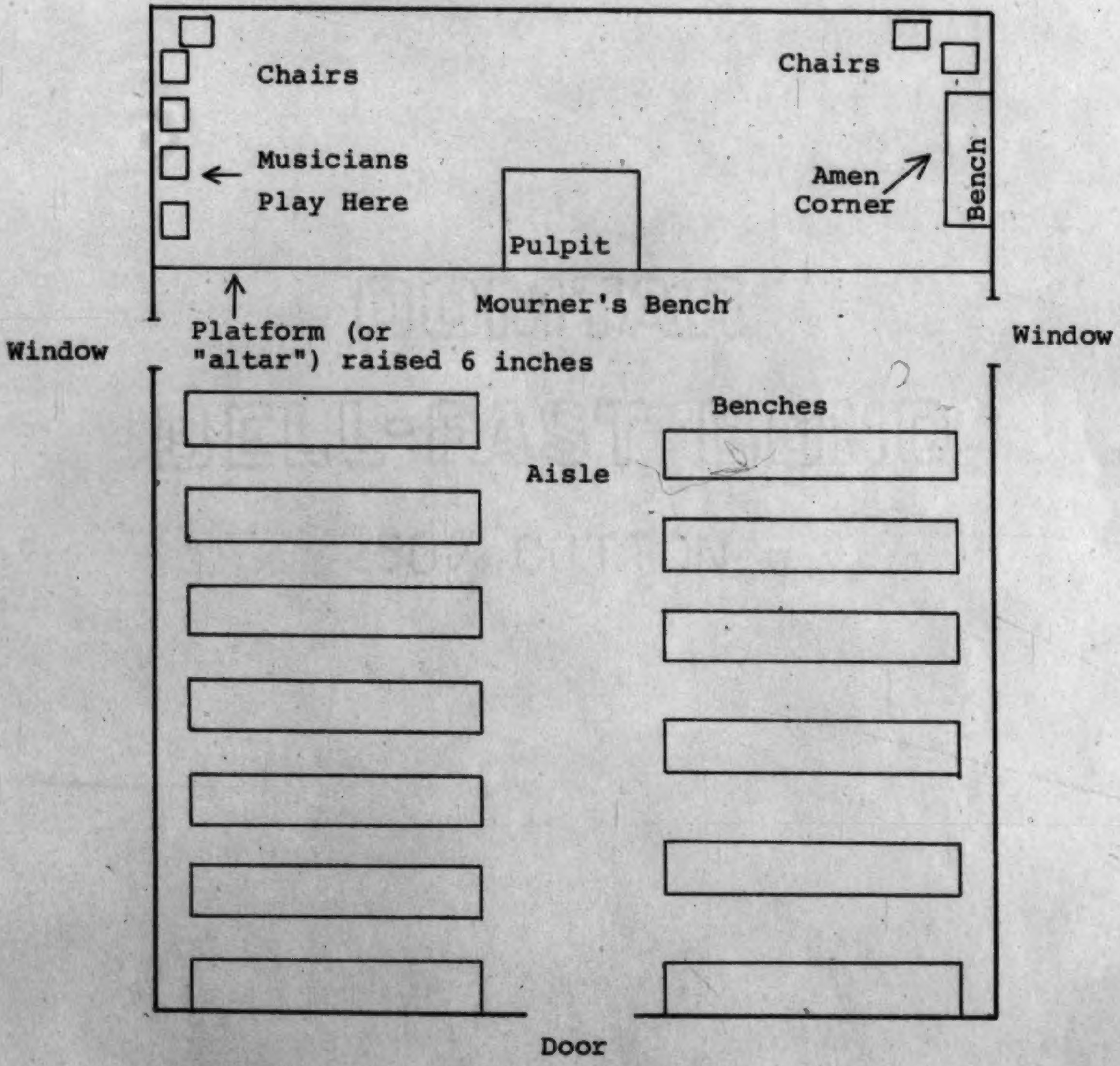
Signs-- This refers to the "five signs" that Mark 16:15-18 specifies as following believers. A sign is a manifestation of God's power and includes serpent-handling, poison drinking, speaking in tongues, etc. The performance of signs is referred to as working in the signs.

Testimony-- Consists of a short oral recounting (by brothers or sisters) of what the "Lord" has done for them and how the religion has affected them personally. Testifying contrasts with preaching as preaching is restricted to males, usually more formal, lasts longer, and takes on a didactic or pedagogic function.

Trinitarian--Trinitarian congregations baptize in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Name of Jesus is not emphasized. This contrasts with Jesus Name congregations.

Word-- Refers to The Word Of God, which saints conceive as the Bible.

INTERNAL LAYOUT OF THE HOLINESS CHURCH OF GOD IN JESUS NAME


Chairs
Chairs
Musicians
Play Here
Amen
Corner
Bench
Pulpit
Mourner's Bench
Platform (or
"altar") raised 6 inches
Window
Window
Benches
Aisle
Door

APPENDIX II

SELECTED SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS, COCKE COUNTY, TENNESSEE (U.S. Census, 1970)

TABLE I

YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED, COCKE COUNTY, (RURAL NON-FARM)

Total, 25 years old and over		6,696
No School years completed		321
Elementary:	1 to 4 years	950
	5 to 7 years	1,372
	8 years	1,544
High School:	1 to 3 years	885
	4 years	1,289
College:	1 to 3 years	237
	4 years or more	98

Median School years completed = 8.5

TABLE II

MANUFACTURING IN COCKE COUNTY, TENNESSEE

Manufacturing	4,132	(No. of People)
Furniture and lumber and wood products	723	
Metal industries	342	
Machinery, except electrical	83	
Electrical machinery, equipment, and supplies	464	
Transportation equipment	5	
Other durable goods	232	
Food and kindred products	704	
Textiles and fabricated textile products	370	
Printing, publishing, and allied industries	32	
Chemicals and allied products	579	
Other nondurable goods (incl. not specified mfg. industries)	598	

TABLE III

PROFESSIONAL AND WHITE COLLAR EMPLOYMENT, COCKE COUNTY, 1970

Other personal services	233	(No. people)
Entertainment and recreation services . .	48	
Banking and credit agencies	40	
Communications	19	
Insurance, real estate, and other finance	43	
Hospitals	58	
Health services, except hospitals . . .	45	
Elementary, secondary schools, and colleges-government--	530	
Elementary, secondary schools, and colleges-private--	35	
Other education and kindred services . .	13	
Welfare, religious, and non-profit membership organizations	62	
Legal, engineering, and miscellaneous professional services	33	
Public administration	161	

TABLE IV

INCOME OF ALL FAMILIES, COCKE COUNTY, 1970

All families	6,641	(No.)
Less than $1,000	513	
$1,000 to $1,999	644	
$2,000 to $2,999	525	
$3,000 to #3,999	664	
$4,000 to $4,999	682	
$5,000 to $5,999	669	
$6,000 to $6,999	755	
$7,000 to $7,999	497	
$8,000 to $8,999	441	
$9,000 to $9,999	373	
$10,000 to $11,999	425	
$12,000 to $14,999	239	
$15,000 to $24,999	186	
$25,000 to $49,999	12	
$50,000 or more	16	

VITA

NAME: Roy James Birckhead

PLACE OF BIRTH: St. Louis, Missouri (USA)

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1943

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND DEGREES:

St. Louis University
St. Louis, Missouri
1961-1965 B.S.

University of Nebraska
Lincoln, Nebraska
1965-1967

University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta
1969-1976 Ph.D.

HONORS AND AWARDS:

Intersession Bursary
University of Alberta
Summer 1971, 1972, and 1974

Graduate Research Assistantship
University of Alberta
1973-1974

Dissertation Fellowship
University of Alberta
1974-1975

Travel Grant
University of Alberta
Spring 1976

RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE:

Teaching Assistant
Department of Geography
University of Nebraska
1965-1967

Instructor
Department of Earth Sciences
Tennessee Technological University
Cookeville, Tennessee
1967-1969

Teaching Assistant
Department of Anthropology
University of Alberta
1970-1973

Instructor
Department of Extension
University of Alberta
Spring 1974

Sessional Lecturer
Department of Anthropology
University of Alberta
1975-1976

Lecturer In Anthroplolgy
Goulburn College of Advanced Education
Goulburn, N.S.W., Australia
1976-

PAPERS READ:

(1) "'God's Not Dead, He Is Still Alive'--A Study of 'Reality Management' In A Southern Appalachian Serpent-Handling Church", American Anthropological Association Meetings, Mexico City, 1974.

(2) "'Sign' And Symbol In A Southern Appalachian Serpent-Handling 'Community'", American Anthropological Association Meetings, San Francisco, 1975.

(3) "'Power' And Everyday Life In A Southern Appalachian Serpent-Handling 'Community'", Southern Anthropological Society Meetings, Atlanta, 1976.